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Traditional tales transformed

By G. S. Kirk

WALTER BURKERT: Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual. University of California Press. £9. 0 520 03771 5

Since the spectacular work of Gilbert Murray, Jane Harrison and A. B. Cook under fifty years ago, anthropology has happened until nothing much has happened until quite recently to enlarge our understanding of ancient rituals and myths. It is mainly Lévi-Strauss's structuralism that has re-opened questions concerning their roles in religious belief and practice, or at least taken them beyond the stage reached by functionalism and what Edmund Leach terms "empiricist structuralism" in the tradition of Durkheim, van Gennep and Radcliffe-Brown. In this broader sense the structural approach, seen at its best in the work of Jean-Pierre Vernant, has illuminated many dark corners of Greek religion. Attempts to apply the severer, more mathematical forms of analysis have almost invariably resulted in formidable distortions of the evidence; in any case there are many important aspects of religion, ritual and myths as a whole to which a different approach is less questionable in theory and more productive in practice.

Walter Burkert, the author of this impressive new book, who moved from Berlin to become Professor of Greek at Zürich and in his forties has become one of the leaders of contemporary classical scholarship, exemplifies such an approach; one that is eclectic in a good sense, even structuralist from time to time, but founded on a striking knowledge of the complex evidence (literary, epigraphical, archaeological, comparative) for this extensive subject, in which a passage from Homer, Sophocles or Plutarch can be productively combined with an Akkadian tablet, an Egyptian ideogram or a Byzantine gloss to produce a new insight. His earlier books on Greek ritual and religion have been *Homo Necans* of 1972, an interesting exercise on the motives of animal sacrifice, and his *History of Greek Religion* in the archaic and classical periods, of 1977, of which an English translation is under preparation in America; a masterly survey, similar in arrangement to Martin Nilsson's great work but briefer, broader and more imaginative in treatment, especially over the Near Eastern evidence and the role of myths.

The present volume is closely based on the author's lectures given at Berkeley in 1977. There is surely some of the same excitement, for specialist and non-specialist alike, in reading these pages as there was for those who came upon Harrison's *Prolegomena* or Murray's *Prolegomena* or Burkert's *Prolegomena* as they first appeared—or for that matter those highly readable if intellectually circumscribed early volumes of *The Golden Bough*. For Burkert offers a rare combination of exact scholarship with imagination and even humour; he is not afraid of changing his arm here and there; he writes well and succinctly, in English as in German, in a style that can become mildly obscure at times but is never boring.

In such series of lectures the connecting thread is often a loose one, here a central thesis is clearly stated early on; that "even the structures of the mind are determined by historical evolution in its largest sense, by tradition, by custom and transforming within the complicated pattern of life". That apparently innocuous statement does, of course, dangerously undermine structuralism in its severer form; Lévi-Strauss and his close supporters refuse to allow any place for diachronic, historical criteria in the assessment of many aspects of religion, rituals and myths, and those who argue for a modified structuralist approach among others (that is, when it appears to disclose layers of meaning that other methods ignore) are accused of radically misunderstanding the whole concept of *mythos*. For this, the human mind is held to conform to the unchanging laws of biology and behaviour and to determine the structure of actions and institutions that themselves, therefore, invariant.

That is a hard doctrine and in practice Lévi-Strauss himself contradicts it from time to time; moreover the supposed metaphysical underpinning of the theory is being subtly modified as the years pass, and more complicated ways are being sought of justifying a philosophical status for what may, after all, be just one way of looking at things.

Burkert softens his amiable but stringent criticisms of Lévi-Strauss by claiming that his own approach is in a way structuralist, in so far as it tries to "establish groups of myths which are identical as to their semantic structure." I am not sure that this will be of much consolation to orthodox Lévi-Straussians, even if it does not depend on an important extent on the almost classic confusion between the limited narrative structuralism of Vladimir Propp and the universalistic system of belief and behaviour that Lévi-Strauss developed out of the superficially similar Jacobsonian approach to language, a system of which the then unheralded Russian scholar sharply disapproved.

It is in other forms of interpretation, in any event, that Burkert is at his very best. The developing applications of myth and the transformation of attitudes and assumptions among their users occupy much of the opening chapter, along with some solid support for the idea of myths as "traditional tales applied" and a plausible view of the nature of "mythical thinking". The *prolegomena* is personal, except for the attempt, not essential to it, to show that myths have some special relationship with language. It hardly needs a combination of Stone logic with Saussure on *signifié/signifiant* and *énoncé/énonciation* to justify the conclusion (on, on pages 2-3) that a myth is not a text. It is surely incorrect to proceed by arguing that its form is "not produced by reality, but by language, whence its basic structure is derived: 'literature'." For language, with its capacity for subordination, reversal, paradox, foreshadowing and retrospect is necessarily linear only in a concrete and ultimately trivial sense; even the concept of "mythical" narrative as simple and straightforward is highly questionable.

The linear form of myths qua tales is produced not by language but by the tale's ostensibly amoralistic character and also by its probable consequentially—and here the difficulty arises that many myths are dramatically incongruous (which again disposes their determination by language in its barest form and as such). Remarks, therefore, such as that the tale "belongs after all not to the realm of the unconscious, but to language", or that "linear narrative is thus a necessary condition for language to map reality", are not without objection.

Many of the specific examples that Burkert adduces to illustrate his assumptions are equivocal in one way or another; that is in the nature of myth, but it is also because he has treated some of the strongest cases elsewhere. Thus his discussion of the tale of Polyphemus does not command immediate assent. Nature-culture oppositions are rejected on the grounds that divine or Golden-Age elements in the monster and his environment are there as a narrative or rhetorical device to stress his savagery; but is this position helped by the comment that "Viewed from

Prop's structuralism, the tale would correspond roughly to functions 11-22, but for the fact that the object to be retrieved, the flocks, is not at the centre of interest, whereas the most striking features are not in Prop's series? Over this issue at least, Lévi-Straussian structuralism seems to me to be more helpful than Proppian. Burkert's own analysis detects Freudian elements as well, but ends by emphasizing historical development, namely in the hardening by fire of the spear-tip with which the Cyclops' eye is destroyed. It is true that Homer has reason to stress that the stake is wooden—but does that make it a probable Palaeolithic relic, especially since, as Herodotus and the author make clear, wooden-tipped spears were still sometimes used even in the full historical era?

Stronger support for historical development in the forms of myths comes in the intriguing fourth chapter, on Heracles, a figure whose complex classical shape depends, it is argued, not only on routinely convergent action-patterns but also on the double long process of narrative elaboration, of the concept of a special kind of character. The evidence for early oriental connections is persuasively set out, and Heracles' encounter with the Delphic Pythia, as Geryon beyond the confines of the human world, in order to capture his divine flocks and lead them back to Argos, is finally related to a common theme (also exemplified in Hindu Indra and Eskimo Sedna) of a master or mistress of animals appropriating divine flocks for human use. The striking resemblance between the three-headed figure in the recently discovered Neolithic cave at Porto Badisco near Oran (Figure 8) and the possibly seventh-century BCE "Daemonic" statue showing the hero fighting monsters (figures 7 and 9) is one of several pieces of evidence marshalled by Burkert with great skill to overcome a possible initial resistance on the part of learner or reader.

There are difficulties, of course; killing monsters rather than bringing them back alive is the dominant theme of the Labours, and one has to suppose—what is not difficult—a degree of accretion here. The suggested trend of diachronic elaboration is not less appealing, that "bearing the marks of alumnus hunting ritual, those tales accumulated to create the character whom the Greeks called Heracles", that he evolved into an overcomer of death when Neolithic preoccupations with cattle-hording were outdated; and that the Dorian invaders of the Peloponnese (if that is what they were) adopted the indigenous "master of animals" as symbol of monarchy and legitimization of conquest.

Burkert has drawn back some way from the rigid connection between myths and rituals that he once favoured; the term he now uses is "symbolism", although even this, precisely interpreted, goes beyond what I believe he really feels: that myths and rituals can, often do, but need not co-exist. The second chapter, on "the persistence of ritual", is the most important here. He distinguishes four possible approaches: the outdated (or rather inadequately formulated) fertility concepts of Mannhardt/Frazer lineage; the Freudian tendency to see ritual behaviour as a response to anxiety; the structuralist/functionalist approach,

which takes rituals as part of the broad social mechanism in the line of Durkheim, Hubert and Mauss, and van Gennep; and finally, the consideration of biological and ethological drives that are assumed to have determined similar behaviour in remote and ultimately animal ancestors—Huxley and Lorenz are Burkert's guides here, together with Karl Moll who first made widely known the probable Palaeolithic and Mesolithic elements in Greek sacrificial ritual of the archaic and classical periods.

It is all too easy to knock the first three approaches firmly on the head, but Burkert is too experienced for that. Naturally, Greek religion and ritual are not mainly or exclusively concerned with fertility "in origin", but at the same time structuralism's disgust with Freud has gone too far. Structuralism's own analysis of ritual is sterile, in a sense, "ethology is more substantial". The resulting interpretations are sometimes impressive, as with the Adonis myth and ritual discussed in the fifth chapter, and sometimes rather speculative. In the sixth and final chapter, entitled "From Telephus to Telephus: in search of Demeter", the various rituals in which a pole is adorned with fruits, flocks and so on (not only the popular rites of Eleusis, but also the Eleusis, but also the cults of "black Demeter" at Phigalia in Arcadia and of the Hittite disappearing-god Telephus) form a pattern, according to Burkert, not just of fertility-beliefs but one in which psychological, structural, and historical interpretation fully converge; a conclusion which is open to some doubt.

The ethological approach leads to some intriguing suggestions in detail, not all of them to be taken too seriously or necessarily so, taken by the author himself. The lilyphalic horns that were placed outside Greek houses remind him that certain species of monkey sit on guard with an erection, and therefore that lilyphalicism can be apotropaic as well as fertility-libation might be a question of demonstratively marking out limits, as with urinating canines; carrying branches as Greek suppliants did could go back to apes, who use branches as flails—or to birds carrying twigs to make a nest. Burkert is uncertain how seriously to take these analogies; early on he states that such examples "prove, I think, that it makes sense to look at human ritual from the viewpoint of biology", whereas later on the same page he describes ethology as "of heuristic, not of probative value". Proof is in any case a difficult matter in such contexts. What any good eclectic will accept is that the biological perspective—as well as the psychological, certainly, and the structural—should be carefully examined in the case of ancient Greek rituals among others. What has to be entirely abandoned, as it is by Burkert, is the uncontrolled and unanalytical comparatism that has bedevilled this topic for everyone except anthropologists, perhaps (and they have their own problems), ever since *The Golden Bough*.

In a slightly different argument, in which psychological motives are rather freely intimated by the author, he claims that sacrifices and other kinds of offering (for example first-fruit offerings) are demonstrative giving in a context of anxiety, either to prevent others from grabbing or to allow fear about losing something. All this leads to the kind of imaginative conclusion known from Burkert's other books, about cooperation by shared guilt, about the traumatic effects of ritual bloodshed about the demonstration that life is unique, but "must accept death in order to perpetuate itself". Here Burkert joins the ranks of intuitive writers on sacrifice, of which even Evans-Pritchard on the Nuer was an uncharacteristic member. But that is not the overall impression left by this brilliant book, in which lively imagination and the willingness to "have a go" are for the most part controlled by different and more rational procedures; and in which the reader can see at every point what is going on in the author's mind—and that is never uninteresting, and rarely unimportant.

Embroidery

I have laid your clothes out on our bed;
smoothing the lace, the silk and satin finery
seam by seam.

Only this mess of coloured thread
remains to fold away:
an embroidery you said was part-dream
and part-imaginary.

You would have finished it next Spring.
These chalkmarks are clouds, and these—men fishing

Ron Butlin

Anita Desai
Clear Light
of Day

Emlyn
Williams
Headlong

Penelope
Lively
Judgement Day
"a marvellous
observation, wit, control
and zest..."
The Observer

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Berridge
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Daily Telegraph

John
Domatilla
The Last Crime
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with the satisfying
qualities of a well-
planned thriller as well
as the intellectual questing
that is the essence of
science fiction".
Financial Times

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The Vendor of
Sweets

"Narayan is the novelist I
most admire in the
English Language".
Graham Greene

Anne
Melville
Lorimers at War

Heinemann

The harmonics of holism

By Steven Rose

GREGORY BATESON:

Mind and Nature
A necessary unity
256pp. Fontana Paperback, £1.95.
0 00 635752 0
(Hardback, Wildwood House, 238pp.
£7.50, 0 7045 3014 7).

There are two conflicting tendencies in biological thought. One arose with Descartes and the birth of modern science: it is analytical, mechanical and reductionist. For this tendency, the task of biological explanation is to dismember the organism into its component parts: organs, cells, molecules; and then to account for the workings of the whole in terms of these discrete units. At its most extreme, philosophical reductionism collapses all higher order discourses into "nothing but" rather messily imprecise special cases of the lower ones. For Descartes, the components were the cogs and pipes of clockwork and hydraulic models. For the nineteenth-century physiological materialists, they were chemical: "Man is what he eats, genius a matter of phosphorus and the brain secretes thought like the kidney urine". Then came the new twentieth-century Mendelians, like Gregory Bateson's father William, the founder of modern genetics, and mechanistic developmentalists like Jacques Loeb, for whom all activity reduced to the sum of simple mechanical tropisms. For today's Cartesianists, the ultimately reduced particle is the DNA molecule, that selfish gene, which claims the organism is merely DNA's way of making more of the same DNA.

The second tendency is synthetic and its roots long predate Descartes, stretching back into the earlier, more holistic harmony of humanity's relationship with nature which was the hallmark of pre-scientific biology. This tradition stresses the integrity of the organism, and the rules of evolution and development that its very structure imposes upon it. Its nineteenth-century exponents were comparative anatomists like Cuvier and Geoffroy St. Hilaire, or, later, the developmental biologist Hirsch (inventor of "entelochy", the "life force" beloved of Sklar).

The steady ascendancy of reductionist thinking diminished the power of the alternative, organicist approach, though this found refuge in Joseph Needham's theoretical biology club in Cambridge in the 1930s, in the genetic systems theory of Von Bertalanffy and, later, G. E. Waddington. Today, it survives in developmental and structural biology and in the preoccupation to vulgar sociobiology: a precious source of alternative thinking about the living world in a society whose biology has suffered from the historical accident (?) that physics developed first as a science, and from the seventeenth century on, became the model towards which all else would aspire. Some, of course, would claim that this was no accident, but the inevitable product of the conjuncture of the birth of modern science with that of modern capitalism.

Gregory Bateson was—despite, or because of, having been reared in the Mendelian tradition of his father—firmly in the holistic camp. *Mind and Nature* is his last book; a summary, epigrammatic and sometimes self-indulgent ramble through the terrain traversed by a career which spanned biology, anthropology, the wide margins to and worked for a long period with Margaret Mead in the 1930s, and anti-psychiatry. It is precisely the sort of attempt to raise the "larger" biological questions with which holism is concerned, and which so irritates its reductionist critics. "A grand but empty synthesis," writes the psychologist Stuart Sutherland in *Nature*; "promiscuous, muddled and rooted in fallacious metaphor," claims another, Nick Humphrey, thus echoing a battle cry of a much older debate.

So what is Bateson arguing? First, as before, he is not a reductionist analysis, he is concerned to stress relationships rather than objects: patterns, symmetries, interactions between components. No object, no phenomenon, exists or has meaning in isolation; both existence and content are given by its interactions, by its past history and present context. For reductionists, the object is ontologically

prior to its relationships: "a noun is the name of a person, place or thing". For the holist it is the system which has ontological priority: "A noun is a word having a certain relationship to a predicate". The apprehension of relationships is part of our sense of aesthetics, and for Bateson even more explicitly than other systems theorists, our loss of the sense of aesthetic unity was, quite simply, an epistemological mistake. The first part of his book, then, is an attempt to reinstate a biology of relationships on which he later tries to build a re-definition of mind and an insistence on the relationships between mental and evolutionary processes.

Having asserted the primacy of relationships, Bateson takes us at a brisk rate through some of the central themes of contemporary philosophy of science, with an unacknowledged debt to Popper and Feyerabend on problems of proof and objectivity; and an assertion of the separation of the world of knowledge from that of the objects of knowledge—the map is not the territory, epistemology is unconscious, the division of the universe into regions to study is part of the knowledge structure—not necessarily part of the universe itself; scientific causation is different from mathematical causation, the first expressing temporal, the second logical, relationships.

The points made are wise and, to me, generally unexceptionable. That they are thrown out by Bateson without being noted in the philosophical and epistemological debate that has raged around them over the past decade may be seen either as the irritating intellectual sloppiness of an autodidact or as the grandeur of a profound mind summarizing a lifetime of experience. An example of the principle of complementarity? From this base comes the central, and for me least satisfactory, part of the book: a reflection on the nature of mind. Bateson lists a series of characteristics of mind, by which, he says, his book must stand or fall. A pity, as it happens reductionist theorizing has been supremely unable to come to grips with mind, leading

as it has to the aridities of Skinnerian behaviourism or Eysenckian psychometry. The rival, more holistic systematics of the Marxist (Luria) or the structuralist traditions (Piaget) have been much richer. Yet Bateson's eclecticism does not, astonishingly, permit him any reference to either of these traditions. Piaget, whose attempts at a genetic epistemology so closely parallel Bateson's, does not even figure in the index.

Perhaps this is why Bateson's list of the characteristics of mind is so empty. "A mind is an aggregate of interacting parts or components. Mental process requires circular... chains of determination.... But these are surely the characteristics of all complex systems, and in the real world, as Bateson himself reminds us, all systems are complex. So, everything is mental, and we are back in one of the old philosophical solutions to the "mind-body problem", double aspect theory. In his attempt to preserve the primacy of relations over objects in the "world of ideas" (another unacknowledged debt to Popper?) Bateson dissolves any specific meaning of mind at all.

It is thus on very shaky ground that he wishes to build his final synthesis: that between the processes of mind and of evolution. Genetic change and the processes involved in learning are analogous, he argues. Again this is a frequently drawn analogy, and not merely by holistic and systems theorists like Piaget. Archetypal sociobiologists, like Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* (1976), argued that the spread of ideas in society was subject to evolutionary and selection pressures similar to those affecting the spread of genes in a population.

During the 1980s there was a period in which it was fashionable to argue that because both genetic transmission and memory involved the preservation and transmission of information, the molecular processes that underlay them would turn out to be the same: if nucleic acids (DNA) were the genetic material, then memories would turn out to be stored in the brain by permutations in the structure of

similar molecules. This is an example of how analogical thinking can lead to profoundly erroneous conclusions concerning mechanism, whether, like the reductionists, you analogize from molecules, or like the holists, from patterns.

Provided one takes his analogy as a metaphor and moves on, Bateson still has some worthwhile things to say. Appropriately enough, given his own family tradition, he demolishes the Lamarckian heresy of the "inheritance of acquired characteristics"—that perennial butt of the geneticists—before proceeding to develop some of the ideas on epigenetics and structure which were first aired in the 1950s by Waddington. This view of evolutionary change, now being extensively and excitingly explored as part of the second wave of opposition to vulgar sociobiology (the first was merely concerned with refuting its more obvious errors and challenging its ideology), emphasizes that selection works only on pre-existing structures, structures whose geometry long predates their present-day adaptiveness.

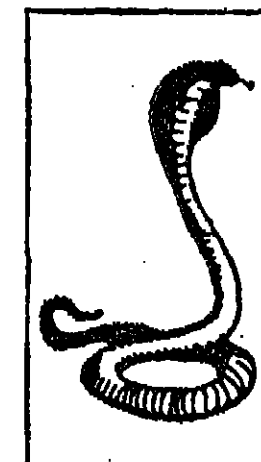
Why do land-living vertebrates have four legs? A Darwinian adaptationist would say because this form is the best solution to the problems of locomotion, and arises by selection acting on random mutations. The structuralist answer is because land-living animals are the successors to four-finned fishes, and stayed with a basic form which was already part of their developmental programme. Developmental processes are conservative, and selection can only act on what is already there. This is why an old biologist's saw claims that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. The processes whereby structural changes imposed by experience during an organism's development become incorporated into its heredity—which Waddington termed genetic assimilation and the experiments in support of which Bateson lovingly details—transcend both Darwinian and Lamarckian models of evolution.

According to a now widely held view, how scientific processes, theory and experiment are intertwined within broad, overarching

paradigms. The reasons why one or another paradigm is accepted at any given time are not purely internal to the paradigm itself. The transition from an earth to a sun-centred view of the universe, for instance, did not depend merely on the accumulation of facts, the disproof of Ptolemy or the proof of Copernicus, but on non-cognitive external, social and ideological factors (beautifully illustrated by the way in which the reasons for support of, or opposition to, the reductionist paradigm which dominates biology, Bateson's book may be seen as the testament of a man whose entire life was a struggle against the atomizing and fragmented world view of reductionism; in biology, anthropology, with its biologically based concepts of biologically based aggression or altruism; and in evolution, with its selfish genes).

Will it be a testament on which the makers of the new paradigm can build? Somehow, I doubt it. That paradigm is beginning to be created through the effort to understand the rich interconnectedness of nature, to account for the tractability of laboratory-based phenomena, and to transcend the aridity of selfish gene with all its ideological refractations. Writing from the intellectual lousiness of California, where eclectic theories and mystical philosophizing do thick as Los Angeles smog, Bateson's words sink into self-indulgence; the book ends with a coy dialogue between the author and a naively inquiring daughter, and an appendix of a memorandum circulated to the Regents of the University of California arguing that contemporary teaching is obsolete and lacking in wisdom.

But the motor for changing that teaching will not be such private memoranda, however prettily printed. For one obsessed with relationships, Bateson's final mission is to ignore the relationship between our thinking and the social system in which we are embedded, to allow his great Californian intellectual, Herbert Marcuse, knew different.



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Emphasizing the elegiac

By John Lucas

PETER JONES and MICHAEL SCHMIDT (Editors): *British Poetry Since 1970: A Critical Survey*. 257pp. Corgi, 1979. £5.95. 0 5635 302 7

In a prefatory note, the editors explain that their new book doesn't attempt to be comprehensive: "Most of the essays are on individual writers." There is nothing wrong with that, although one is bound to note some striking omissions. Scottish poets come off badly. Nothing on MacGill or Mackay. Brown, nor on Sillkin or Maclean, for that matter, even though the publication of *Poems for Elinor*, in 1971, was surely an event of very considerable importance. And indeed, if one thinks of individual volumes rather than writers, the omissions become even more striking. In their bibliography of poetry published between 1970 and 1980 the editors list, among others, Sillkin's *Amara Grass*, Anne Stevenson's *Correspondences*, Derek Mahon's *The Snow Part*, Paul Muldoon's *New Year*, and Peter Porter's *The Coast of Scoundrel*. None of these is mentioned in the essays.

In the cases of Mahon and Muldoon this is presumably because, as the editors tell us in their polemical introduction, with the exception of Heaney and Tom Paulin, Ulster's poetic activity "does not transcend locality." It is difficult to know whether this remark is the result of blindness or ignorance. Have they actually read "In a Disused Shed in Co. Wexford," for example, or "Elizabeth?" Sillkin is perhaps omitted because he had a row with David Davie and Porter because Davie doesn't approve of him. (Davie and C. H. Sisson are very obviously the presiding influences over the collection.) But I think it very odd that *Correspondences* should be listed in the bibliography and yet not be thought important enough to merit a critical essay. Still, although this hardly gives one confidence in the editors' critical acumen, it perhaps doesn't finally matter. Good poets eventually make their way, and *The Snow Part*, *Correspondences*, and *The Coast of Scoundrel* don't lack recognition as being among the best work to have come out of the 1970s.

At the back of *British Poetry Since 1970* is an anthology of poems "to indicate where we, as editors and publishers, place our emphasis." One can hardly object to that, but it is surely less than satisfactory that several poets whom the editors and/or contributors praise do not appear in the anthology, so that one can not always put the rightness of that praise to the test. This is not, however, the case of well-established poets. On the other hand, since the anthology is a way of raising the colours, it seems strange that there is nothing by David Davie or Tom Paulin, and yet whose work is so readily known to the "general poetry reader" for whom the editors intend their book to be of value.

It is a decent enough intention, but I doubt whether it will be realized. There is an unmistakable air of critical drudgery about the majority of the essays, especially those on R. S. Thomas, W. S. Graham, Sisson, Davie, Hughes and Larkin. They are not necessarily bad but they certainly are not very good, and I think they are doing Andrew Waterman a disservice. Grey Hill is so vividly written that the general reader is likely to find himself wondering whether he has not accidentally strayed into the wrong book.

Much of Hill's poetry is religious, but it is less vulnerable to easy explication than, say, later R. S. Thomas's religious poetry, this is precisely because Hill gives complex spiritual experience and questioning recurrent realization, where Thomas's poems, depending most of their time telling us what they are on about instead of getting on with being it, fall towards the mere higher prattle of the metaphysically worried man.

Or, like Eliot with *Prologue*, Gertrude, Tiresias, Hill masks utterance with purposeful discretion from the authorial identity. King

Offa, or in that oblique fiction "The Seaboard of Sebastian Arruarez" what Hill's notes tell us is an "apocryphal Spanish poet".

Reading sentences such as those, one wonders whether prose should not be at least as well written as poetry.

What are we left with? In the first place, excellent essays on Thom Gunn and Charles Tomlinson by respectively Clive Wilmer and Michael Kirkham. In the past decade a considerable amount has been written about both poets, but these two essays are ideal introductions: lucid, intelligent, and above all capable of making the poems discussed seem worth discussing. There is also a note by Thom Gunn on Dick Davis's *In the Distance* which is perfect of its kind. I do not see how anyone could read it without immediately wanting to buy Davis's volume.

Davis is a young poet. So are Craig Raine, Tom Paulin and Andrew Motion, and Blake Morrison pays particular attention to all three in his essay "Young Poets in the 1970s". Since Motion is the only one of these included in the anthology, the general reader will no doubt wish to check his view against Morrison's, and Peter Porter's back of the book. He may, however, feel somewhat alarmed by the terms of Morrison's praise. Motion's "is, of course, a twilight world... Whatever he sees or touches is dissolved before him." It sounds a bit like Theodore Wratzlaw in *crepe* shoes. And it is.

The inland docks contain their waste of sky, and limp along the Number illustrate a map I cannot recognise as home tonight. Though will, in time, I watch you vanish on the last train south, through districts no one visits.

Motion takes a good deal from Edward Thomas and Larkin—far more than he faces—but the echoes serve to remind one that, after all, both these poets are much tougher, more resilient, than he is. And reading these lines from "Hull Paragon", with their exquisite but essentially witty cadences, their carefully planted properties (the would be a waste of sky and the lugubriousness of "vanish on the last train south"), I find that there sounds irresistibly in my head the words Byron growled at Tom Moore: "Don't be so damned poetical".

Morrison remarks of Craig Raine that there is "in some quarters strong resistance" to his work. One of those quarters is very obviously occupied by Peter Jones and Michael Schmidt. In their introduction they make three specific charges against him. The first is that he is praised by John Bayley and John Carey. "Against the general poetic gloom of our best writers, a game rather than a 'game' appeals to some critics. It alleviates the tedium of the severe directing attention towards prosody, Davie, Thomas or the serious levity of Graham." There are confusions here. The editors imply that Bayley and Carey prefer Raine to the other poets they mention. I am not aware that this is so, but even if it is,

it is hardly Raine's fault. Moreover "general poetic gloom" is a heavy loading of terms, and suggests that a particular kind of cultural conservatism must be the truth of the matter. If Raine won't endorse apocalypse then he is clearly no good. But anyway, the chief spokesmen for this gloom appears to be C. H. Sisson, who according to John Pilling has an "unsparring awareness of cultural malaise". Yet in his own essay Sisson attacks Larkin for helping the malaise forward. I think that one ought to object to Sisson's own "unsparring awareness" by the way, but it is hardly necessary to do so in order to see that this objection to Craig Raine's work comes out of a very muddled ideological position.

A second criticism of Raine is that his metaphorical dazzle dims our vision rather than, as Morrison claims, helping us to see. "What we are supposed to see becomes more remote: when a gardener stands dazed as a teapot, do we see a gardener, teapot, or some steam left off by the connection?" It is true that this is not one of Raine's most distinguished comparisons, but it surely requires no great effort to realize that he is asking us to make a connection between the way the gardener stands and the way a teapot handles and serves tea. The poet, however, is not to be taken from one to the other in order to alert us to the actuality of those shapes. To ask for more is to ask for what words cannot give. "The lion's head painted by Le Douanier Rousseau. But it is an odd reader who cannot experience a delighted recognition at the best of Marianne Moore's images, and an odd one who fails to see the wit and justice in the best of Raine's."

The third criticism has more substance, though it is overstated. It is that Raine and Christopher Reid, with whom he's often linked, lack prosodic skills. "Interest in and understanding of prosody have not characterized the 1970s." Agreed, and yet it is not the fault of Raine or Reid. Prosody usually works in the faintest of ideas of how a poem should sound. Not long ago I heard a young man from Cambridge lecturing on Hardy's poetry, and his attempt to read "Look Into My Glass" was rather like what would sound like if I tried to sing madrigals. It is the shining that students at all levels can write apparently competent critical essays on poems, and yet simply can't begin to hear what the poems are about. I take it that this is what Jones and Schmidt mean when they say that "the market for teachable poetry is the readiest one," meaning by "teachable" the "well-made poem" with a discursive or teasing image structure, and a carefully planned metaphor, and a paraphrase of the past. It is in fact precisely a fashionable ideology, and therefore a programmatically shallow one. This becomes clear if we look at Robert Wells's *The Axehandle*, which is included in the anthology.

Calling my eyes back from the sea—With adoration I watched the horizon lift Above the headlands, far up against the sky—

They wish to argue that the 1970s lacked "defining and unifying

social issues with 'imaginative content', and as evidence of this they cite George Steiner's end-of-the-century contention that now "even the young have the strong intuition that every hope goes wrong". Why did we let ourselves be seduced by the great dreams? They were, I think, enormously creative mistakes, enormously creative fantasies. What really scares me at the moment is: how do we operate without such windows? What happens when there is the insight or the conviction that the instinct that, whatever you do, you'll get it wrong?

The implication behind all this is that, in the editors' words, "betrayed by the forward dreams of ideology," young poets "set out to explore that betrayal". Hence the predominance during the decade of poetry of an elegiac tone, which speaks for a community or place, and hence also the fact that the poet who goes back to the time before we went to sleep and seeks there the source of the dream can help to clarify, if not alleviate, our situation. His poem may be an imaginative analysis and a kind of exorcism. During the trip into the past, he may release old and very real, but neglected "nature" as Robert Wells and Dick Davis have done.

There is much more here than can be argued with in a review, but a few points need to be made. What exactly were those enormous creative mistakes, those great dreams? Steiner's journalistic generalizations don't allow of an answer, but they sound suspiciously like the 1960s hippie-style pipe dreams of peace and love, which can hardly be thought of as creative at all. Such dreams aren't in any sense ideological, but although ideology implies vision, it is built out of kinds of hard thought and considered intellectual commitment that have nothing to do with the editors' idea of a fashionable mode, but ideas, real ideas, do not make their appearance and disappearance merely to satisfy the shaping whims of trendspotters; and to pretend that they do is to become a trend-potter yourself (a charge which *British Poetry Since 1970* can't altogether avoid).

It is therefore quite wrong to say that young poets during the 1970s were betrayed by the forward dreams of ideology, because betrayal requires a commitment which these poets surely never had. True, Steiner imputes it to himself. "Why did we let ourselves be seduced by the great dreams?" But to be blunt, if you put it like that you have no conception of what's at issue. And I think the same may well be true of those young poets whom the editors mention, for whom "a trip into the past" is in fact precisely a fashionable ideology, and therefore a programmatically shallow one. This becomes clear if we look at Robert Wells's *The Axehandle*, which is included in the anthology.

Calling my eyes back from the sea—With adoration I watched the horizon lift Above the headlands, far up against the sky—

And looking instead for a human touch Even at this distance, to hold it back, to hold it back, to hold it back.

I noticed the axe where I had put it. An arm graceful and certain as the hillsides. Evidencing the generations of it. The impulse that fuels this poem, presumably one in which the poet opposes the desire for self-annihilation ideally to a "human touch" which will "hold me back". Yet the uneasy tone of that phrase and the word "adornment" suggests a very self-conscious awareness that this almost Shelleyan diction is mere pose, is not any sort of commitment. And is not, then, the description of the axehandle as like "An arm graceful and certain as the hillsides" a place of programmatic "medievalism" in the expression of that ideal?

That runs at least as far back as Ruskin on the Nature of Gothic, and whose unexamined literariness and sentimentality in Wells can become the more noticeable when one considers that the arm is supposed to be shaped by the hand that swings it? ("What we see is what we are.") One has only to think of Frost's "Moving" to realise how factitious and cliché-ridden Wells' kind of poem is. And presumably the editors are as much, for why else should they surround the *Wells* with quotation marks?

One other essay deserves mention. In "English and American in 'Brigflatts'" Donald Dave argues persuasively for the importance of Basil Buntings poem, and especially for Buntings's objectivity. Concern with "concerning his well-situated, one on the heel of the other (object on verb on subject), but no interstices are left through which his eye on the thing to be said can be deflected towards the reader, the person he is saying it to." But this argument is a strange polemic against English poets, who are accused of paying altogether too much attention to their readers. This is how Davis puts the matter.

The sad fact is that English readers of contemporary poetry—just because they are so few—have got used to being lulled and coaxed, at all events sedulously attended to by their poets. Teachers in English classrooms have for years now persuaded their children and students to conceive of the reading of a poem as responding to moods that the poet, on this showing, debased into a rhetoric, it is supposed at every point addressed to them. And English teachers have taken to their bosoms a poet like the late John Berryman...

This is a deeply unsatisfactory way of proceeding. What evidence has Davis that readers are used to being lulled and coaxed by their poets, or that teachers behave in the way he claims? It is not odd that always supposing what he is guilty of finding what is not in the poem ("supposedly addressing to them"), since according to Davis it is in the poem, or at least in the work of those English poets who "sedulously" attend to their readers? And who are these English poets? Berryman, according to Davis, but then he is American, so Davis has to claim that English readers have taken to their bosoms, which if it is as far from the truth as it may be.

I draw attention to this tangled argument because it has to do with Davis's strongly-urged but I think dangerous endorsement of the "objectivist" "determination to put the reader down in size, to let him realise that he is only at it, were a bystander." A bystander is a person present but not involved, and indeed the noun is customarily preceded by the adjective "casual". The casual bystander, say, a street quarrel, observes it for as long as he pleases, and then walks away. He may have understood little or nothing of what he observed, and he is free to leave whenever he chooses. I do not think that this is a helpful analogy for the reader of poetry, "general" or otherwise.

Sensuality from the start

By Charles Rycroft

TOM O'CARROLL: *The Radical Case*. 280pp. Peter Owen, £14.95. 0 726 0546 6

MORTON SCHATZMAN: *The Story of Ruth*. 306pp. Duckworth, £6.95. 0 7156 1504 1

The word "paedophilia" was introduced into the psychiatric literature in the early years of this century by Krafft-Ebing to describe those child molesters who are "drawn to children not in consequence of those charged morally or physically incommensurate, but rather by a morbid disposition, a psychosexual perversion, which may at present be named paedophilia erotica." In Krafft-Ebing's opinion paedophiles comprised only a small minority of those charged with sexual offences against children, the large majority being cases of "acquired mental weakness", resulting from senile dementia, brain disease, epilepsy, syphilis, etc. He seems, however, to have been wrong about this, or perhaps times have changed—since more recent studies suggest that the vast majority of persons charged with sexual offences against children are physically healthy young and middle-aged men who correspond more or less to Krafft-Ebing's picture of paedophilia erotica. The relevant statistical data about the age-incidence, intelligence, education, family background, marital status, psychiatric diagnosis, etc. of men convicted of sexual offences against children in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom can be found in Part II of Mohr J. W. et al's *Paedophilia and Exhibitionism* (1964), a source book which will, most emphatically, not be outdated by Tom O'Carroll's *Paedophilia: The Radical Case*.

Krafft-Ebing's lurid picture of the typical child molester still, however, survives in popular fiction, and uninformed parents still tend to overestimate the risk that their children will be raped or murdered by mad, dirty, old strangers and to underestimate that of their being "interfered with" by relatives, family friends and neighbours. Nor have they assimilated the fact that children not infrequently collaborateate willingly in their own molestation: the forensic literature distinguishes between "accidental" and "participative" victims.

However, in spite of the fact that professionals concerned with offences against children know that the facts of the matter are not as horrendous as the popular imagination believes, no one until recently would have questioned the assumption that paedophilic propensities are in some important sense morbid and perverse or that the sexual activity of such adults is harmful to children, and that, therefore, legislation to protect children from them is necessary. But since 1974, when the Paedophile Information Exchange was founded, and more particularly, now that Tom O'Carroll, chairperson, has published his defence of paedophilia, it has become necessary to try to take seriously, even if only for a moment, the idea that paedophiles are an oppressed minority whose activities should be unconfined, both for their own sakes and for the sake of the children they wish to pleasure.

The word "paedophilia" has, O'Carroll says, become "a crusading badge of identity for those whom the term had been designed to oppress." His reasoning seems to be as follows. (1) Sexual activity is pleasurable, harmless and conducive of happiness and should, therefore, be encouraged. (2) Children, even infants, are capable of orgasm, and should, therefore, have them. (3) Puberty is not an event of crucial importance. (4) Sexual deviations from the normal are not perversions of development but mere idiosyncrasies; homosexuals and paedophiles have, therefore, the same right to sexual fulfilment as heterosexuals, and legislation restricting their activities is analogous to racial discrimination. (5) The intuitive conviction of paedophiles that their feelings towards immature children are warm and benevolent is self-evident and does not require critical scrutiny, but the "gut-reactions" (his phrase) of those who are repelled by paedophilia are mere prejudice.

Of course, if it were true that sexual activity is always harmless, always conducive to happiness, if it

were true that the orgasms of children were always manifestations of *joie de vivre* and never symptoms of loneliness and tension, and that the orgasms of children and of adults were similar, instead of differing as they do in vigour, feeling, tone and productivity, then perhaps there would be something to be said for Mr O'Carroll's arguments. He quotes with approval the Child's Sexual Bill of Rights formulated by the Childhood Sexuality Circle of America which proclaims, among other things, that children have a natural, inalienable right to receive contraceptive aids for intercourse with their parents, siblings "or other responsible adult or child" but he argues, albeit apologetically, in favour of the conservative proposition that boys and girls before the age of twelve are not yet ready to give informed consent to penetration. It seems to me that Mr O'Carroll consistently ignores two very simple truths: that philia may mask phobia, so that love of children may conceal fear of adults, and that there would be no need for laws or restraints of any kind if human beings were always benevolent, responsible, and wise. The tragedy is that they are not.

Perhaps Mr O'Carroll should read Morton Schatzman's *The Story of Ruth*, which describes some of the effects on one ten-year-old girl of her father claiming from her his "natural" right to sexual fulfilment. But incestuous paedophilic rape is only one, and perhaps not the most important, feature of the curious story Dr Schatzman has to tell. It begins, informally, as a game of consequences, with offbeat American psychiatrists, Dr Morton Schatzman, meeting his fascinating American mother-of-three, Ruth, in his office in North London, England. She feared that she was going crazy, as she was seeing images everywhere of her father, hated father. He realized immediately that he was encountering something quite outside his experience: "Never before had I met or even heard of anyone whose central problem was persecution by an 'evil eye' and 'evil' words. If the invisibility to other people of what she had been seeing necessarily meant that nothing was there."

In other words, it was the psychiatrist, Dr Schatzman, who took seriously the idea that she might

have had moments of understandable anger. Now old tensions were recognized and resolved. Jane, calm and happy—"This is a good place," she reported many times—was able to help her father to realize that his own fear of death, rooted in a peculiarly British Victorian expectation of a painful death, was the reason for his inability to accept her own dying. Her mother found a peace that made her remember her daughter's gentle relinquishing of life as a beautiful rather than a fearful thing.

To say that *A Way to Die* is the story of a tragedy is to convey something of a triumph, for to convey something of the achievement of the hospices. Readers will find in it suggestions on how they can help the movement; the authors are making a contribution from their royalties towards the endowment of a university chair in hospice studies. Meanwhile some of those who work in our hospices might take to heart certain elementary precepts which are part of the ethos of the hospices—that nothing should be done to a patient without previous explanation of the reasons for it; that the patient says he feels; that nurses and doctors should always talk to, never at or about a patient, even when the patient is apparently unconscious. When they are involved in the more spectacular, desperate cases, medicine, even quite nice people are liable to forget such basics.

"MELI MEDICI PILI MARTINI"—the name of the first known British medical practitioner, Melius son of Martinius, appears on a fifth/sixth-century tombstone now in the parish churchyard of Llanglan in Llyn, picture in the recently published *A Doctor for the People: 2,000 years of general practice in Britain*, by John Cole (145pp. Oxford Books, £13.50, 0 90614 28 2). Generously illustrated, this book traces the development of medical practice from the Druids to the foundation of the National Health Service.

really be seeing something, while it was the patient, Ruth, who took the common-sense, orthodox psychiatric view that, since she was seeing things that weren't there, she must be going crazy. This curious reversal of received roles and assumptions is responsible for the somewhat creepy sense of suspense that permeates the book and makes it compulsive reading. Until nearly the end it remains just possible that Dr Schatzman will think up some ingenious test that will convince him and perhaps his readers that Ruth was indeed seeing things that were there but others couldn't see, and we share his disappointment when he has to accept that her apparitions cannot be anything more than her own mental imagery perceived with exceptional intensity and clarity.

In a revealing aside Dr Schatzman writes: "As a child I sometimes felt while walking alone in the woods that I was in a place where no human being had ever been before. I wondered now if anyone besides Ruth and me [sic] had ever traversed the same ground we were now treading upon." Ruth and he seem to have done their best to explore virgin territory, and it is, I suppose, just possible that Ruth is the first psychiatric patient ever to have been paid to explore on his instructions and in his presence and then persuade the two of them to exchange seats, and that Dr Schatzman is the first psychiatrist ever to exchange seats with him. But I wouldn't be too sure. Morton Prince in his *The Dissection of a Personality* describes equally unlikely multiple interactions between himself and the various Sally Beauchamps.

When a psychiatrist writes a story for the general public, not a case history for his colleagues, he is, I suppose, entitled to be disingenuous for the sake of the story. I find it hard to believe that Dr Schatzman had never even heard of anyone being persecuted by an apparition or that he was really quite as unfamiliar with the literature on hysteria, traumatic neurosis, hypnosis and multiple personality as he

claims to have been when he first met Ruth. But it makes a better story to describe Ruth's abstractions of her numerous childhood traumas, during which she reverted to childish speech and spoke in the present tense, as though they were rare, undocumented phenomena, than to make it clear that every psychiatrist has read about them and every psychotherapist encounters them occasionally. (The first patient to abreact in this way in my presence sensed my unfamiliarity with the phenomenon and stopped for a moment to assure me, in her adult voice, that she would return to normal before the end of the session.)

Ruth also had the capacity to act (or revert to) any age that Dr Schatzman asked her to. This phenomenon, called "hysteric age regression"—is responsible for some of the liveliest passages in the book. Dr Schatzman arranged for the present, the fifteen-year-old and the ten-year-old Ruth to be subjected to a battery of psychological tests and was present while they were being given. The fifteen-year-old Ruth, who in her own words was "smart but not educated" and came from the wrong side of the tracks, was amazingly perceptive and cheeky in a way that she could not have afforded to be when as a teenager in care she had really been at the mercy of decisions made by psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers.

Finally, it must be reported that Dr Schatzman's treatment of Ruth was both wildly unconventional and highly successful. He taught her to stand up to and dismiss unpleasant apparitions and to conjure up pleasant ones, and converted her distressing symptom into an enjoyable talent. When Dr Schatzman last contacted her, she told him that her apparitions were just entertainment for me now. I play with them. A peculiar though happy outcome, which Dr Schatzman finds as puzzling as his readers will. Could it, one wonders, have anything to do with transference? In such cases it usually does.

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commentary

Who's afraid of fantasy?

By Rosemary Dinwiddie

The Waterfall
BBC TV

BBC's four-part adaptation of Margaret Drabble's *The Waterfall* is a great success, particularly in its casting and playing. Peter Duffell, who dramatised and directed, has got the balance of the scenes right both between the man and woman, Jane and James, and the two women, Jane and Lucy (they are cousins; Jane loves Lucy's husband, James). The centre of the film, Lisa Harrow as Jane Gray, is on screen much of the time; she has the kind of beauty that stands up to patient exploration by the camera and holds the story together. It also contrasts perfectly with Caroline Mortimer's Lucy, both high-chested and wide-mouthed, the two might well be cousins, but—as in the novel—Lucy is tougher, wearier. Their anger, guilt, affection, complicity are entirely credible. And so is the high romance of Jane's sudden love affair with James: thrashing on the beach, the two in a room; instead, looks and gestures, a certain gravity.

Yet wasn't the book quite different? What I had retained from reading it shortly after it came out in 1969 was an image of cold, an improbable but impressive fantasy of a woman giving birth alone in a white desolation, not a story of "problems" and "adjustment" (as it is described in a *Radi Times* interview with author and cast). The novel, but not the television version, does indeed open with such a scene: snow falls outside while deserted Jane has her baby, haunted by a remembered story of a woman stranded in the Arctic and giving birth alone.

But Peter Duffell could not have reproduced it quite that way: Drabble uses two distinct voices in the novel, and he had to find a note somewhere between the two. One is the voice of a poet and fantasist,

violently literary and romantic, unashamedly laden with sin, guilt, and remorse. The other is the voice that has become the more typical Drabble note over the years—sturdy and sane, the voice of survival. "It is all so different from what I had expected. It is all so much more cheerful" is its tone; the words—not included in the play—are Jane's at the end of the book, where there is a great brightening of skies and clearing away of snowstorms. The first, romantic voice is much the better.

That opening—the snow, the overcast room, dim light, sleeping baby, James's chaste, silent fall in love with his cousin's wife as he nurses her—is drenched in fantasy and all the more powerful for it. It has fairytale blood and snow, a little incest, delivery, deliverance, a hero who "looks dangerous" but is gentle. It is a womb-trip, a shared birth. It is also a fantasy of culture, and of rescue through sexuality (Jane has been frigid): "You're my prisoner," James says. "And in the end, then, will you rescue me?" she asks. He does. "Falling, coming towards him, meeting him at last, down there in his arms, half dead but not dead, crying out in him, trembling, shuddering, quaking, drunched and drowned, down there at last in the water."

This is how Jane Eyre's author might have written about sex if she had lived in the 1960s. The romantic side of the book is saturated in nineteenth-century fiction. The women's names suggest Jane Eyre, Agnes Grey, Lucy Snowe; James Oxford, perhaps a Regency buck (he is a paragon-owner and looks like Shelley); the newborn is Bianca, for the snow. The snow has an association with the erring woman turned out of doors with her child, for Jane's account of herself is loaded with terms like abandonment and repentance. She is also Lady Jane Grey, executed for a brief moment of queenship; James's near-fatal car accident is the price they almost have to pay for adultery.

She is partly based, says Margaret Drabble in the interview, on Sylvia Plath, and there is certainly a hint of the hermetic atmosphere of *The Bell Jar*; Jane (who does write serious poetry) is so fragile that she once fainted when she read the instructions on a Tampax box. But there is also the other voice that Drabble gives her, the one that starts out again after the opening section with "It won't, of course, do; as an account, I mean, of what took place." In the play these comments from an alter ego are given by a very together Mr Gray direct to camera. Jane, the book makes clear, discovers a certain arrogance and talent for succeeding.

Guilt, capture and swoons have gone out very fast since 1969; a rough sisterliness has come in, and the play stresses the comradeship between the two women, relatively unimportant in the novel. It is clear from the *Radi Times* interview that in fact everyone is bothered about the book's being a love story: Jane seems quite mad to her now, Drabble is quoted as saying, and she is really more in ecology these days; crazy, immature, says Caroline Mortimer severely. Jane has "social and sexual problems". So, no doubt, did Maggie Tulliver and Catherine Earnshaw and Jane Eyre, and what a pity there was not a sensible social worker to sort them out.

In fact the novel—which is rather good—is definitely not about immature behaviour or social problems. Drabble succeeds in integrating the passionate and the wry voices in which Jane tells her story; she is given a moment of doubting the realism of the love affair, but decides that it was a mirage that proved to be a real oasis—"miles of verdure, rivers, fishes, coloured birds...". The book's theme—recognized by the play's closing words, "I know in circumstance, I by myself at its feet"—is that where experience is most powerful, people must be helped; it celebrates passivity. An unfashionable quality, though recommended for poets by Wordsworth and Keats.



A detail from José Clemente Orozco's fresco "The Reactionary Force" (1934), from the catalogue of the exhibition devoted to his work in the Museum of Modern Art, Pentonville St, Oxford, until January 4. The catalogue (128pp, including 10pp of colour plates) is available for £4.95 at the exhibition or £3.95 (plus £1 postage) by post from the Museum.

Volume and pressure

By Chris May

Babylon
Gate 2 Cinema, Russell Square

Chemically, in terms of story-line and character development, *Babylon*, as its director, Franco Rosso, admits, is no masterpiece; it is essentially a pulp movie. But, because of its successful exposition of metropolitan life to white British audiences, its importance transcends ordinary critical values. Rastu, for all its philosophical inconsistencies and nonsense such as the depiction of Hailu Selassie and unrealistic fundamentalist demands for repatriation to Africa, remains the dominant political and cultural force for black British youth. In rastafarian terminology "Babylon" stands for all the perceived evils of Western civilization—from the police to punk eating—the pressure of Western civilization itself.

Babylon is about pressure. The hero, Blue (convincingly played by the reggae musician Bimbley Pardo), suffers the difficulties common to young urban blacks: unemployment, racist attacks on the streets, police harassment which results in parental disapproval and eventually forces him to leave home. Together with his friend Reddy (portrayed by Trevor Laird, who deftly balances humour and pent-up aggression) he finds solace in operating a "sound system" (a mobile, highly amplified reggae disc-jockey). The thin plot, a vehicle for a picture of life on the street in Britain, culminates in a police raid on a party at which rival sound-system operators compete in a contest, the winner of which is decided as much by the volume of the music as by its quality.

More of a documentary than a work of fiction, apart from its tendency to cram an improbable amount of action into a short time span, *Babylon* is a thoroughly convincing account of one aspect of black British youth culture. Divisions between reality and fantasy blur into insignificance.

Such a working method was deliberately chosen by Rosso, whose previous work includes *House on the Hill*, the story of a black borel boy, which was

banished by ATV, and *Prod and Flood*, the Linton Kwesi Johnson documentary, banned by the BBC during the last General Election. Rosso says "my first job is to entertain, but I also believe in filming things the way they are. *Babylon* is fiction, a story, but it is a story that could happen, and the situations are entirely real."

One scene shows the destruction of Blue's sound system equipment by local National Front supporters. During filming the crew leave a mock-up sound system in a local garage overnight and the next morning they discover that it has been destroyed by local racists. Accuracy and attention to detail are the result: both good entertainment and incisive social comment.

Two notable poetry readings take place tonight and next Friday evening at the Keats House, Keats Court, London NW3: November 21, Ted Ruzwicz and his translator Adam Czornikowski; November 22, Geoffrey Hill (a rare public appearance) and Marjorie Keats. Admission is £1.50 at the door.

TLS Children's books

Signposts to judgment

By Margaret Meek

NANCY CHAMBERS (Editor):

The Signal Approach to Children's Books

Keats, £12.50.
0 7226 5641 G

If any doubts remain about the nature, scope, quality and significance of children's literature, they must surely be dispelled by the contents of *The Signal Approach to Children's Books*. In this remarkable festschrift which celebrates twenty years of the magazine, authors, critics, commentators, collectors, poets, translators and illustrators are brought together, with Nancy Chambers's meticulous editorial care, to illustrate the pattern and movement of children's literature over a decade. The reader, even one who read all of the essays when they first appeared, can recall neglected perceptions, examine established criteria and move forward to new evaluations.

The *Signal* approach is clearly eclectic, but distinctive. From its earliest days the magazine gave writers the space they needed to examine ideas, texts or critical theory so that the cursory glances of reviewing could be replaced by sustained argument. Elaine Moss became a regular contributor at the same time as she began the annual survey that was published as *Children's Books of the Year*. Now, her own decade of work completed, she writes a summary of the series that brings into focus the educational, social, economic and publishing backgrounds against which children's books were written, sold and reviewed. She examines the picture book, the teenage novel, ("an awkward phenomenon, easily accommodated") the preoccupations that surround literature in our multicultural society, sexism in children's books and the significance of community publishing.

Mrs Moss's commentary is matched by selections from John Donaghy's reports on the American scene. (*Signal* has had strong transatlantic ties and some affinity with *The Horn Book*.) Both are concerned with problems of censorship, spelling, racism and sexism in what is offered to children to read. It is clear that the 1970s raised these issues; they are an urgent legacy for the 1980s in both Britain and the United States. Mercifully, we benefit from a common language that lets us share Maurice Sendak, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Isaac Bashevis Singer, all of whom are represented here, as is that masterly contributor to children's rights, *The Shrinker* of Treheren.

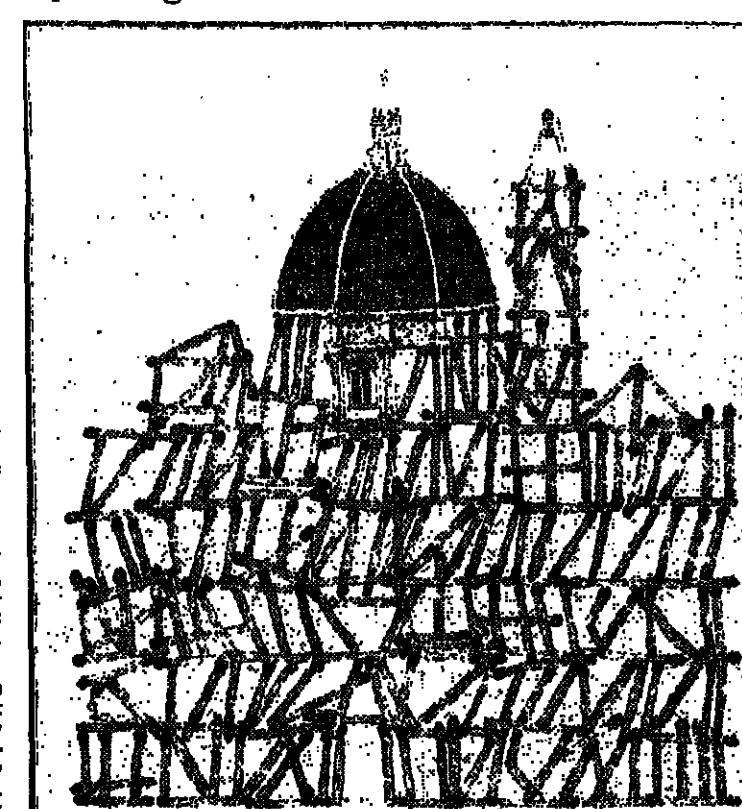
Tribute is paid to more traditional

approaches: the historical studies of the fairy tale (Frederic Whitely) and the Victorian novel (Lance Salway). The essays, which illustrate the popularity of Perrault and Ilesha Stretton are now part of a more widespread interest in early children's books to which both of these authors have made distinctive contributions in full-length studies. What *Signal* initiates is often extended elsewhere. Another example of a conventional approach is the study of an individual author, represented by Charles Sarland's analysis of William Mayne's four books about the cathedral choir school. Sarland looks into the intricacies of Mayne's prose and his technique for making the reader stand back from immediate empathy with a character or from being carried on the tide of the narrative. Even if he does not resolve his own puzzle of whether Mayne's readers should be experienced before they read him or become experienced by reading him, it is a subtle analysis, a good illustration of what a sympathetic critic can do in an essay that he could not encompass in a review.

It is interesting to set these expositions alongside the current appeal of *Asterix*. The popularity of Goscinny and Uderzo in English-speaking countries is undoubtedly the result of the translators' skill. Anthea Bell's account of rendering *Asterix* *do force*. The crafted subtlety of the French demands more than substitution of the jokes and puns; it needs a matching set of cultural references and allusions. In this specially selected article we see how it is done.

Where the book scores is in the presentation of opposing points of view. Texts which cause discussion among critics are rarely negligible, and critical divergence allows us to examine the values that inform literary judgments. I would therefore direct the reader's first steps to the essays on poetry and then to a network of criticism that links the book as a whole.

The publication of *Crow* prompted John Adams in 1971 to examine the poetry of Ted Hughes in the light of his influence on the teaching of poetry in schools. Adams contrasts Hughes's emphasis on the vitality of verse with his "black view of life to the point of chaos". Brian Morse, drawing on George Steiner, challenges Adams and asserts that the goodness of a work of art lies in its specifically literary merit rather than its presumed effects. In 1979 Adams wrote a postscript, in which he revised some earlier judgments and considered Hughes's most recent work. What seemed the time to be self-indulgent critical joy-riding



A house for pigs in sticks or a Church with fragile foundations? "Santa Piammiera del Fiore, or The Three Little Pigs" from *The Unique World of Mitsumasa Anno*, published by Bodley Head (£5.95, 0 370 303644 4) simultaneously with Anno's *Medieval World*, reviewed on page 1327, suggests that more than the house of sticks in the folktale will fall to the puff of the wolf.

is seen, here, to be at the heart of responses to children's literature. I don't mean the idea that poems can be taught to young readers, but that serious, if differing, individual approaches to a complex work are more likely to do justice to the work's complexity than a single formal judgment, and he keeps at bay Chambers's attempts to cut down "the creative act into the critic's categories: it is an extraneous spiral, and many readers unused to 'assembling generalizations from the vagaries of transcribed utterance will find it more challenging than the traditional autonomous text. The point is that this book as a whole provides the context for this discussion. I do not know where else we could have had access to these soundings and discoveries."

The heart of the matter, and the book, is the representation of critical approach. In a lecture published in 1974 John Rowe Townsend claimed that "the assessment of children's books takes place in an atmosphere of unparalleled intellectual confusion". He controls this chaos by asserting that what "a consensus of adults assigns to the children's shelves is

children's literature, provided it contains 'the revelation of the possibilities of human nature for good or ill'. In January 1975 Robert Looson challenged the notion of intellectual and cultural consensus, affirming that definitions of fiction, reality and fantasy are socially learned. Attacking the idea of the critic as a pragmatic purist, and the idea of the writer who writes for himself ("a monster, the quintessence of bourgeois egoism") Looson exposed what writers and critics were actually concealing from each other: the change in children's literature from "a minority interest to something like a mass movement, involving not just writer, editor, critic but large numbers of librarians, teachers and the public". It was a challenge to *Signal* to move with the times.

In a new place, Peter Hunt returns to the problem of "what 'good' and 'less good' are supposed to mean" in relation to children's books. He distinguishes quality, judgment within a kind or class, from value, a judgment between classes, and "achieved

response from potential response to a given book. In this essay the criticism of books for children becomes more significantly part of the continuum of criticism in general. The way had already been opened up by Aidan Chambers's explanation of the ideas of Iser and Wayne Booth in "The Reader in the Book" which appeared in 1977. It is a thoughtful piece, which attempts to use the concept of the implied reader, the child, to examine the author's meanings. More effective, perhaps, in its examination of individual works than in the exposition of a sustained theoretical position (his notion of the "unyielding child reader", for instance, is unsupported by evidence), this essay is clearly at the heart of current *Signal* approaches.

This is demonstrated in the long single piece, a transcription of Aidan Chambers's interview with Alan Garner, which appeared in an abridged version in 1978. This is offered as "one instance of a *Signal* way of talking about children's books". I am glad to have every word of it, not because of any specific approach or insight it contains, but as an example of the nature of judgments and criticisms, and the cluster of ideas that can be made clear when authors and readers explore each other's points of view. Cutting back and forth, modifying and rejecting each other's examples and intuitions, writer and critic employ many ways of arriving at conclusions. They generalize by means of anecdote and recollection as well as by comparative analysis. Their criteria are flexible; they range widely in their quest for the elusive "what it is" that turns language into symbol. They examine their variances, their values, their personal myths as literature acts them out. Garner's stance is holistic: "If a child can read with a totality of experience and the adult can too, that is a good children's book", and he keeps at bay Chambers's attempts to cut down "the creative act into the critic's categories: it is an extraneous spiral, and many readers unused to 'assembling generalizations from the vagaries of transcribed utterance will find it more challenging than the traditional autonomous text. The point is that this book as a whole provides the context for this discussion. I do not know where else we could have had access to these soundings and discoveries."

Signal has always provided many signposts. Some have led to new pastures for its readers, and some to dead-ends. That it has survived the exigencies of the 1970s is greatly to the editor's credit; that it is aware of only here and there a sign of the emerging issues of the 1980s, is a hopeful sign for us all.

Lordly lookalikes

By Nick Roddick

Kagemusha
Gate Cinema, Notting Hill; Gate 3 Cinema, Camden Town

There is nothing particularly original about a comparison between John Ford and Akira Kurosawa: most critics have made it at one point or other. But that at the age of sixty-nine Ford should have produced *Cheppena Autumn* while at seventy Kurosawa gives us *Kagemusha*: a coincidence worth considering. The dominant mode of both films is that of elegy—not merely for a lost period of history (as decisively lost for Ford eighty years after the event as for Kurosawa four hundred years on), but for a lifetime's style.

True, there is a strong, perhaps dominant, streak of conservatism in Ford's idealized, reshaping of the American West, whereas Kurosawa has never portrayed Japanese feudalism as anything other than a period of random violence in which individual choices were made. But in practice the two views come close to one another. John Wayne's Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* is no less excluded from the settler community in whose name he has carried out his obsessive quest than is Takashi Shimura's Kamei for the farmers in the end of *Seven Samurai*. And when the two directors importantly share an ability to create, more through visual and narrative structures than through straightforward storylines, an epic cinema whose subject matter is the process of history itself.

Kagemusha has all the signs of being Kurosawa's farewell to the samurai film (a genre, moreover, which he has not touched for nearly twenty years). Set at the end of the sixteenth century during the period of complex upheaval which preceded

the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate, it is despite the importance of its opening scenes, the relatively simple story of a thief who, because of his close resemblance to the head of the Takeda clan, is trained as the lord's double. When the lord is killed by a stray bullet, it is imperative that whether of the other two rival clan leaders should know, and the "shadow warrior" stands in for him. The submergence of his identity is something he appears to view with relative equanimity: socially marginal (like his producer, Samuel, who is identity counted for very little in the first place, but a little overconfidence with a difficult horse leads to his being revealed as an impostor. Kicked out of the castle, he witnesses the destruction of the Takeda clan by the Tokugawa. In a final act of self-destruction (which is also an assumption of his false identity), he immolates himself on the battlefield and staggers away to die in the waters of the lake in which his noble double has been ceremonially buried.

Kagemusha is a controlled, masterly work. At the same time, there is absolutely nothing new in the film, indeed nothing that Kurosawa himself has not tried in earlier

movies. In visual terms, his use of the telegraph lens to thrust the viewer into the heart of the action is a device perfected in *Seven Samurai*. Bizarre moments of humour punctuate the narrative as they did in Kurosawa's earlier samurai pictures. The unreal, stylized colour palette is strongly reminiscent of *Dodecadon*, his first colour film. The pacing—long periods of inactivity punctuated by sudden flurries of movement—reflects his adaptation to cinema of the traditional rhythms of Japanese storytelling. Above all, the use of the "double" theme—a man destructively but bewitchingly dominated by another—is one that permeates all Kurosawa's films, historical as well as modern.

But there is no other Kurosawa film in which all these elements have fused so completely. Even the sublime sentimentality of *Kiris* is present, in the scene in which the double is forbidden to say farewell to the "grandchild" with whom he has struck up the film's only real relationship. *Kagemusha* is visually beautiful (especially in the scenes of the young lord in a bare room) and exceptionally powerful. But in its symmetry and serenity something seems to be missing.

From 'The Wave Hennets'

You could run along railings with a stick—they'd clatter like ratchets as if stillness came sound. On your bike you let off a fusillade just with a folded pocket in your brake. What a hush from walls—you heard it resound, hummer itself back from the train, lamps would make sudden thumps, wooden fences roar, hedges hiss, open streets yawn at your passing; and the pole, took a hump right along the wire with a hiss sparking like fireworks, but the wire didn't bow along too. At the end, the hump disappeared. Does a body go humming like this through wires?

Edmond Leo Wright

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CHATTO & WINDUS

Right is might

By Dominic Hibberd

P. J. KAVANAGH:

Rebel for Good

Budley Head, £4.50.

0 370 30326 1

The Quest must be one of the most tried and dependable of story forms. It ensures continuity, a central character and a climactic discovery, yet it also allows for digressions, changing scenery and new experiences. The discovery can be anticipated yet turn out to be not what was expected and the quester's journey may in the end be as much into himself as into some heart of darkness in the 'world outside'. In *Rebel for Good*, the quester is a young man in search of his father; one of his fellow-travellers obligingly suggests that he may also be in search of himself. The journey takes him from Gloucestershire to the American Mid-West, with a digression for a Mediterranean sea-

This is surely the middle volume in a trilogy. The first novel was *Scarf Jack*, and in *Rebel for Good* the same father and son appear. It is the father, not the son, who is the rebel (both 'for good' and 'for God'); recent convention might expect the rules to be reversed, but the new generation may well find itself in sympathy with the subterranean son of a breakaway father. This Telenachus can see both sides of a question. His father has the idealistic zeal of the 1960s but is rather more competent than most of the rebels of that strange decade; he belongs, in fact, to the early nineteenth century, when it was not impossible for a white man to lead a Red Indian tribe in a noble but

vain effort to secure peace between them and the invading settlers. Jack Place does it, anyhow, and his son even as young Francis completes his clear vision of himself and of humanity, his father is blinded by white man's bomb. Not killed, though, and we may expect to encounter him, still rebellious in the third volume.

There are some nice period details and descriptions, including an impeccably collected band of Freemen who collect bandaged Indians as noble savages. Francis travels across the States with him in the year of Trafalgar, and the moral is there for those who wish to take it. Life in the early Republic is vividly evoked. The 'new poets' are mentioned, and Francis learns that man needs a right relationship with Nature even though civilized men, as well as savages, are capable of nobility. As a surgeon, he heals when others kill and he is on life's side. Let us hope that the beautiful Sarah, who has not to wait too long before her young knight is returned to her.

Watery perils

By Sarah Hayes

LINDSAY BROWN:

The Secret of the Silver Lockets

Bale, £3.50.

0 7091 8596 0

ERIC WILSON:

The Lost Treasure of Casa Loma

Budley Head, £3.95.

0 370 30342 3

JOAN TATE:

Turn Again, Whittington

Pelham Books, £3.95.

0 7207 1285 8

The formula for mystery stories has not varied in half a century. It goes as follows: a small number of children of both sexes fall without adult help, a larger group of assorted grotesques after adventures involving cunning, guile, ruses, riddles, wiles, traps, jewels, car chase, escapes and wild incidents. The closer these would-be thrillers come to their fossilized mould, the more successful they are; their popularity must thus be due in part to their predictability. The vocabulary is easy, the story has no subplots or subtleties of any sort; the characters never step into the third dimension. Yet there is more than just convention at work. At the point at which children begin to draw women with eyelashes and bosoms, they also begin to write adventure stories to formulas laid down by famous fives and secret sevens. A dread of individuality and the consequent comfort to be gained from conforming must surely be at the root of the continued success of a genre whose hallmark is mediocrity.

Fourteen-year-old Lindsay Brown is excellent at mediocrity to order, presumably because she is a genuine consumer. *The Secret of the Silver Lockets* is her second thriller and with occasional lapses into clearly description, it races efficiently through the usual network of alarms and coincidences. Miss Brown is not afraid to call her villains names such as

Dudgum and Cokor or The Tigress (who is 'fashionably dressed in burgundy cords with a matching gold-buttoned waistcoat over a white blouse'). She bravely allows her child-heroes to escape down a tree which falls neatly into the bedroom in which they are incarcerated and, again, to survive certain disaster when they fall fifty feet into a fjord. Cliches abound, but enthusiasm and a healthy lack of self-consciousness keep the adventure afloat.

The Lost Treasure of Casa Loma, fourth in a system of Canada-based mystery stories, founders. Again it features bright boy and girl, lost jewels and watery terrors (Niagara Falls), but it makes the mistake of offering its readers actual clues—Smythe, the suspicious butler, points the blacksmith is mounting and it is not quite straightforward in its denou-

ment — the arch-villainess directs operations from her wheelchair. "Light-hearted" (as the blurb describes it), this may be, but heavy-handed is how it reads.

Joan Tate, a good writer venting on this occasion her second-best mystery hat, departs considerably from the formula. Her villains are not burglar Bills but city fish swimmers aiming to cut out her pocket; her girl heroine is an American accompanying her father on a home-fide genealogical holiday; the boy is the Shrewsbury fireball's son. Adults are seen here more as people than simple law provokers, and their presence is actually and refreshingly necessary at all points in telling the bad hats. Within its limits, this is a well constructed, humorous, lively, interesting thriller. But its merits will doubtless render it less acceptable to the Rhythmatics who are likely to read it.

Strange but true

By Mary Furness

WILLARD PRICE:

Arctic Adventure

Cape, £4.95

0 224 01819 1

Arctic Adventure is Willard Price's fourteen-year-old book, and it is his first cold weather one. It is a book for two brothers, Hal and Roger Price (twenty and fifteen years old respectively) whose father, a supplier of animals to zoos, has sent them to Greenland and Alaska to capture a range of exotic fauna.

Every chapter describes the hazards involved in capturing a particular animal, or in battling against extremely hostile weather conditions, and in the process an enormous number of facts, usually of the little-known or strange-but-true variety, are dispensed. Every child of 10 or 11 will find the book a cast of mind will find the whereabouts to outlandish his friends and enemies with questions such as "What is a willow?"

Prophets of the Pier

Well, once we told people's fortunes, but now
We sit in our robes and fish from the pier,
We fish from the pier: though they call to us
That the sea receded many a year

Agoo, on our little camp stools we sit
And fling out our hooks at low green land where
Children walk by with their dogs through the grass,
And the slight summer breeze makes waves in it.

Well, we are wise and we are ready, when
The dyke they have built to hold back the brute
Sea shatters in the distance, for a full
Rampaging day there will then come waves not
Consisting of grass; and in pain and blood,
The children and dogs will be crying out
And with our lines and hooks and prayers, we will
Fish from the pier in the horrible flood.

Alan Brownjohn

Utopia for the young

By Edward Blishen

LIONEL DAVIDSON:

Under Plum Lake

Cape, £4.50.

0 224 01873 6

Under Plum Lake is an elegiac story about the monstrous imperfection of human life, and some young readers are likely to remember it for ever. Some will be drawn by the dust jacket to expect a quite different book. This jacket is charmingly crammed with little fluting and gurgling figures in a fairytale landscape — ice-croon mountains and barley-sugar buildings. The charm is curiously wrong though one does see the problem faced by the illustrator, Mike Wilks, whose black and white illustrations in the text itself seem wholly fitting.

It all happens to Barry, eleven years old, in Cornwall. A cliff and cave appears Dido. He is a lad of ninety-nine from a world that exists thirty miles under the sea, and was colonized millions of years ago by men who had made a mess of the earth's crust when trying to shift the planet into a different star

system. As we who live on the surface (or on the tops of mountains, as Dido points out) are to dogs, so the people of Egon are to us.

Their advanced technology (to use a perfectly inadequate term) is suggested as, in general, a matter of dissolving. Now you're here, now you're there. As a small detail, you can be a carnivore without taking life. "He said you didn't have to kill the cow to get at the steak. You could make the steak the same way the cow did." Life is fun: not on some hedonistic principle, but because "it's supposed to be". That's the logic of it. To sit worrying on our mountain tops, as we surface people do, is to make some fundamental error about the very nature of life.

Barry should never have been taken down to Egon. His memory of it will have to be erased. Then it's discovered that a storm has blown up on the Cornish surface: he'll have to stay for days. The business of erasure must go much deeper than expected. And—paradoxically—because Dido has come to love Barry—it doesn't work: and Barry is left living mournfully, with impossible memories, in a world that "seems childish and ignorant. I feel I've stepped back a thousand years".

It's *Utopia* for the young, in fact: modernized, and expressed in clear, plain prose. Greatly readable, and kept in movement as a story by the urgent sadness that blows, as it were, backwards from its ending. If there's a problem, it is in the description of the "fun" which is taken to be not so much the business as the essence of life. Some children will cheer (or, looking back on their reading as adults, may cheer) at the notion that humans might become infinitely serious and understanding without also becoming infinitely incapable of joy—especially physical joy. There's nothing here of your Shavian view that, if we are to have large minds, the rest of us must wither. There are immense satisfactions in, as it were, super-cinemas; and also in a vastly up-graded sort of hang-gliding. There's also much pure pleasure for pure pleasure's sake. "There was an air of such excitement and gaiety everywhere that I found myself laughing out loud."

Here and there one senses a tendency to suggest that life in Egon is a sort of polymathic candyfloss. Thus, one sees, Mr Wilks's problem with the dust jacket. But that's to look a pretty rare gift horse in the mouth. There are not many books intended for the young that have such readability combined with such thoughtfulness.

Timeless and cautionary

By Catharine Rawlinson

RUTH AINSWORTH:

The Pirate Ship and Other Stories

Illustrated by Shirley Hughes

Heinemann, £4.95.

0 434 92589 6

MILES MACQUEEN:

Curious Tales

Illustrated by Adolf Borg

Translated by Marie Burg

Oxford University Press, £3.95.

0 19 91427 9

The Pirate Ship and Other Stories is a collection which ranges from very short stories for very small children to longer, quite substantial stories for older children—in fact it is a book a child could grow up with, a book to dip into, and return to again. The early stories have a quality of timelessness, give a gentle world where scarecrows live sparrow-straw for their nests. Many of Ruth Ainsworth's stories have been broadcast on "Listen with Mother" and have the nursery wholeness which one associates with that programme. Her subjects range from the pirates of the title to mermaids and kittens, from a snowflake to a school bus and a magic bicycle, and there are one

or two Russian folk tales which add spice to the variety. Some of the stories include often-repeated rhymes, always appealing to children, which will encourage those listening to join in. A strong thread of fantasy weaves through the book, particularly evident in the longer stories for older readers or listeners, which is well matched by the many sensitive black-and-white line drawings.

Miles MacQueen's *Curious Tales* are rather different, being both curious and sometimes cautionary. His writing flows in a direct, chatty way, full of slightly off-beat wit, with a sometimes almost surrealistic quality. He produces a shaggy kitchen sink, many militant almost "fed up to the cogs", two snowmen who long to see the fruits and flowers of summer and a carnivorous plant who discovers roast turkey. As an adult I find some of the cautionary lines almost too macabre—there is Mathilda who gets a spine head up to the cogs, with it balled, not to mention the little boy who was made into boards for making kitchen cupboards; no doubt children will relish them. The stories are of varying lengths and are ideal for reading aloud, being almost as much fun to read as to listen to; and there are many bold illustrations in both black and white and colour.

A new Jerusalem

By Elizabeth Moberly

PETER DICKINSON:

City of Gold

Other stories from the Old Testament

Illustrated by Michael Foreman

Gollancz, £5.95, 0 575 02883 1

The retelling of Bible stories demands a certain flair if respect for the original narrative is not to be reduced to mere repetitiveness. Peter Dickinson has met this need by a creative reconstruction of the oral tradition that preceded the more definitive shaping of the Old Testament text. *City of Gold* comprises thirty-three stories, told as they might once have been told, in an imaginative variety of human situations. Narrators include an Edomite hunter, an Egyptian fisherman, a parent speaking to their children and grandchildren, and professional story-tellers. The overall narrative is suggested, from the stories of Genesis to the fall of Jerusalem, but the location of the story-telling is back and forth between widely differing periods. The twelfth plague of Egypt is envisaged as being recounted during the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 BC.

The context is less directly relevant, but again enlivens its content: the tale of David and Goliath is placed in the mouth

of a sergeant in the Babylonian army, instructing recruits on how not to behave when confronted by a slinger. There is pervasive humour—where humour is appropriate—and one of the most ingenious vignettes is the description of King Saul's illness as part of a course in an early medical school. The reader is informed of the difficulty of "diagnosis of possession by Rational Demons", and signs and symptoms are outlined in a style that combines the clinical with the anecdotal.

These stories may well be read individually, but taken together they constitute the epic that is the Old Testament. The birth and growth of a nation, then its decline and eventual exile after the destruction of Jerusalem, the City of Gold. The beginning and the end are skilfully and unobtrusively linked by setting the telling of both stories during the Babylonian exile. Each alike suggests a note of hope. The story of the garden of Eden concludes with the longing for a second Adam to undo the foolishness of the first Adam, and the journey into exile to undo the vision of a new Jerusalem yet to come. This is a good drama, a good theology. Never pious in a pejorative sense, the narrative nevertheless does justice to the faith of the tradition it expresses. Peter Dickinson's skill is matched by Michael Foreman's excellent illustrations. This is altogether a most impressive and delightful volume.

Orcadia

By Charles Causley

GEORGE MACKAY BROWN:

Six Lives of Fankle the Cat

Chatto and Windus, £4.95.

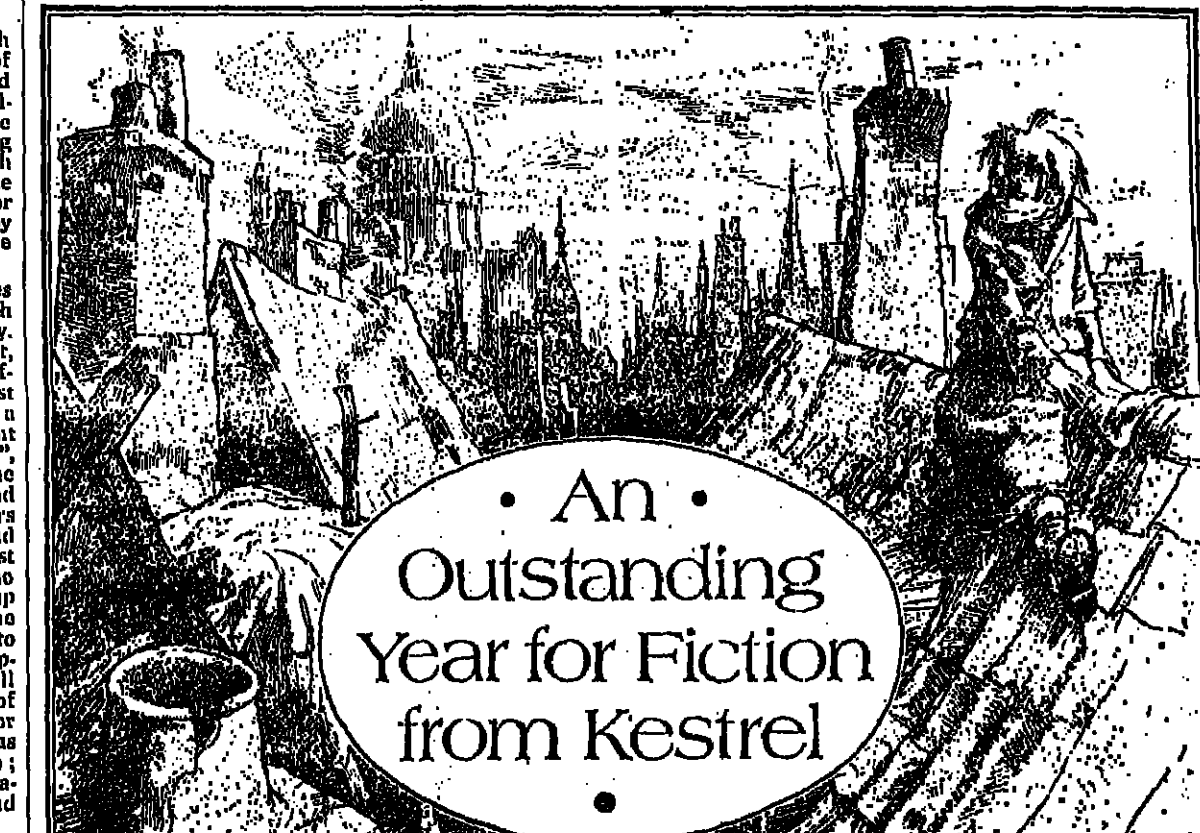
0 7011 2534 9

The first thing to be said about George Mackay Brown's *Six Lives of Fankle the Cat* is that it suggests itself admirably as a serial-story for reading aloud. It must also be said that, despite the witty and nicely complementary illustrations by Ian MacInnes, it rests on the page a little more uselessly. Mr Brown's relaxed manner and somewhat loosely constructed narrative lack the cutting edge, the dramatic tension, the hint of other worlds behind the words, that we have grown to expect from his brilliant creation and re-creation of Orcadian myth and legend, for children and adults.

It is as though when faced with an audience perhaps younger than that of his earlier children's tales his nerve has occasionally failed him. Fankle is a "midnight-faced", talking cat, rescued from death by stone and water by little Jenny Thomson, a child girl, who wouldn't say a such word as a horse-fly that has stung her". Mr Brown's story is of

Fankle's various existences: in pirate-haunted Liverpool, Ancient Egypt, China, on the moon, and in Orkney itself. The quality of the stories is uneven. In some, such as the mysterious "Roses and Moonlight", in which Fankle disappears and we meet the darkly prophetic and cat-loving Ma Scud ("There's a certain person in this island that makes cat soup"), he soars to the top of his form. Others, notably the tale of the cherry-cake-addicted Kirk minister, are curiously unimpressive. But throughout the book, tempering considerably its generally over-sweet tone, the sharp eye of the poet and a corresponding deftness of observation and phrase are constantly displayed. On a day of now, Sammy the schoolboy's mouth is a "red smoking O". Jenny's hypochondriac mother, suddenly deprived of a day's outing over the sea to Ebor, looks like "one of the hanging gardens of Babylon in her summer dress".

Few contemporary poets have written more rewardingly both for adults and children than Mackay Brown. So far, as he stands at the barrel, he has handed out the undusted milk. With *Fankle* comes the addition of a little water. The result is by no means unpleasant, but one feels that he might have trusted the strong heads and handiwork of his younger readers a little more.



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Anne Wood, *Books for Your Children*

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Mary Jane Drummond, *Times Educational Supplement* £1.95 each (Puffin paperback 60p)

Dickensian Christmas

By Ann Thwaite

PAUL THEROUX:
London Snow
With wood engravings by John Lawrence
Hamish Hamilton, £4.95,
0 241 10450 5

LYNNE REID BANKS:
The Indian in the Cupboard
Illustrated by Robin Jacques
Dent, £4.95,
0 460 06892 6

For writers seem to take equally seriously the business of writing for children and for adults. Penelope Lively and Nina Bayden apart, the more usual pattern is for the established novelist occasionally to throw off a brief *jeu d'esprit* for the young. This can be disappointing (James Joyce's *The Cat and the Devil*) or rewarding (Mordcai Richler's *Jacob Two-Two and the Hooded Faun*), or somewhere between the two: H. G. Wells's *The Story of Tommy* is charming enough but would hardly have been noticed if it had not been by H. G. Wells. People who take writing for children seriously tend to get hot under the collar about people who do not and protest vehemently at the idea that children's books are an easy option. E. W. Hillier years ago

in his *Children and Fiction* quoted a Times interview with Janice Elliott: "The only book that did not take around nine months to write was *The Birthday Unicorn*. Maybe being a children's book had something to do with it, but it took only three weeks. Hillier added at the "old-fashioned" and pointed out that since the book was considerably shorter than Miss Elliott's adult novels it naturally took less time to write.

No story masquerading as a novel could be much shorter than Paul Theroux's new children's book, *London Snow*. It is a very pretty book indeed, with wood engravings by John Lawrence as jacket, frontispiece and chapter headings. It was first issued last year in a limited edition of 450 signed copies by Michael Russell Publishers, following the success of *A Christmas Card*. Theroux's first children's book, a ghost story set among the snows of New England and looking back, it seemed, to the author's Massachusetts childhood. Christmas stories, the blurb writers tell us, are supposed to be timeless and to appeal both to the young and everyone else. It is impossible to avoid the word "Dickensian" when writing about *London Snow*. Mr. Snyder is a Scrooge figure and like Scrooge he is reformed at Christmas. Mrs. Mutterance and her foster children, black Wallace and white Amy, a contemporary touch, but

and Wallace actually says "Yuck" at one point. I suspect a few of the cynical young might say "Yuck" themselves when Snyder finally decides "It's wonderful to be alive." The less cynical will enjoy Theroux's stylish descriptions of a London silent with snow, the freezing of the fountains, the boat in the churchyard, the row across the swirling Thames.

Lynne Reid Banks's story is another matter, both from Theroux's calculated charm and the facetiousness of her own earlier *Adventures of King Midas*. She certainly uses some of the strengths she has shown in the best of her adult novels. Her new book *The Indian in the Cupboard* is a real children's book; original, lively, compulsive reading. There is a fine writing, but the children in the story are real children and the realism of the book's bringing to life of one of his plastic Red Indians appallingly convincing. The impressive thing is that, having thought of this good idea, Ms Banks is able to develop and sustain the story with a precision of her young readers, to touch on basic problems of human relationships. The plastic men become human and the problems go far beyond the obvious one that the Indian may shoot the cowboy with his arrows. The story will well stand that repeated reading children often give to books that seize their imaginations.

Extra-ordinary

By Judith Elkin

M. M. KAYE:
The Ordinary Princess
Illustrated by Patric Jacques
Kestrel, £3.95,
0 7226 5729 3

ROSEMARY MANNING:
Dragon in the Harbour
Illustrated by Peter Rush
Kestrel, £3.95,
0 7226 5690 4

There is great excitement in the kingdom of Phantasmorania at the prospect of a new princess, for the seventh daughter of the king is traditionally about as beautiful and most gifted. The Princess Alexandra Adelaide Auralia Ann lives up to her promise and a grand christening party is planned in her honour. The king is against inviting the party but he is overruled. The party progresses splendidly until the last and most important of the fairy godmothers, Crustacea, arrives. Her temper, always inclined to be a bit uncertain on dry land, is aggravated by being caught in a traffic jam. She views the huge pile of presents and the list of gifts bestowed by the other fairies: Wit, Charm, Courage, Health, Wisdom, Grace... and gives a gift which she promises will bring more happiness than all these "fabulous and frippieries put together". The princess shall be ORDINARY.

Crustacea's magic is stronger than that of the other fairies, so that spell works admirably. Princess Amy grows up with freckles, mouse-coloured, straight hair and a turned-up nose. Admittedly, she possesses all the other fairy gifts but no-one seems to notice. The Princess herself is delighted as she is free to do all sorts of un-princess-like things, such as escaping to the Forest of Faraway to play with the birds and wild animals. The crunch comes when all the other

princesses have been married off and finding suitors for Amy proves to be difficult. The Council has to be persuaded that they hire a dragon to lay waste the countryside and St. Georges. But this is too much for Amy who escapes to her forest. In the end, of course, she is an idyllic life in the forest followed by a spell as the queen's assistant kitchen maid, in a nearby palace, she finds her Prince.

This is a delightful, vivacious, told with great wit and sensitivity. The characters are vividly and humorously portrayed and admirably captured in the illustrations by Patric Jacques. M. M. Kaye proves herself a first-rate storyteller in the fairy tale tradition. She combines economy of style with a splendid tongue-in-cheek sense of humour which perfectly matches the slightly off-beat tale.

Many young readers will be pleased to note that R. Dragon is back after a hibernation of nearly twenty years. *Dragon in the Harbour* is the fourth title about the very personable dragon who has lived in Cornwall for some 1,500 years, is well versed in the legends of life in the Court of King Arthur and gave up eating people many years ago.

In this story, he is rapidly accepted into the yardling atmosphere of Weymouth where he becomes an important landmark, quite capable of causing a tidal wave or merely gently rocking the harbour with his rhythmic snoring. Two small holidaymakers, Adam and John, plague him with their riddles and jokes, and soon find they are all involved in a smuggling plot.

This is a pleasant, lively story, again establishing the dragon as a real character: gregarious, morose at times short-tempered and always hungry. This fantasy element in an everyday setting and interspersed with a mystery, makes a light-hearted and very readable story for younger children.

Elaborately decorative paintings have, for several years now, been used to provide illustrations for a number of children's books, which are in any case normally bought by adults for children, and are more likely to sell on their visual appeal than on the quality of their writing. Some painters, anxious to reach an audience beyond the art gallery, have begun to realize that illustrated books provide one means of doing so: yet the more such work begins to appear in response to an inner impulse, the more difficult it is to make a successful book out of it. Patricia Neville's paintings inspired by the life of the nineteenth-century clown Grimaldi (and—more directly—by Picasso, Douanier Rousseau, and the American primitives) are accompanied by an account of some incidents in his life. This text, discontinuous, is difficult to follow, and likely merely to puzzle the young reader. The surreal paintings are not always obviously related to the text while being deliberately unrealistic: for example, Grimaldi is dressed as a clown in the most unlikely circumstances. Ironically Grimaldi's life and times would make a good subject for a children's book, but this treatment almost excludes the reader in its insistent self-indulgence.

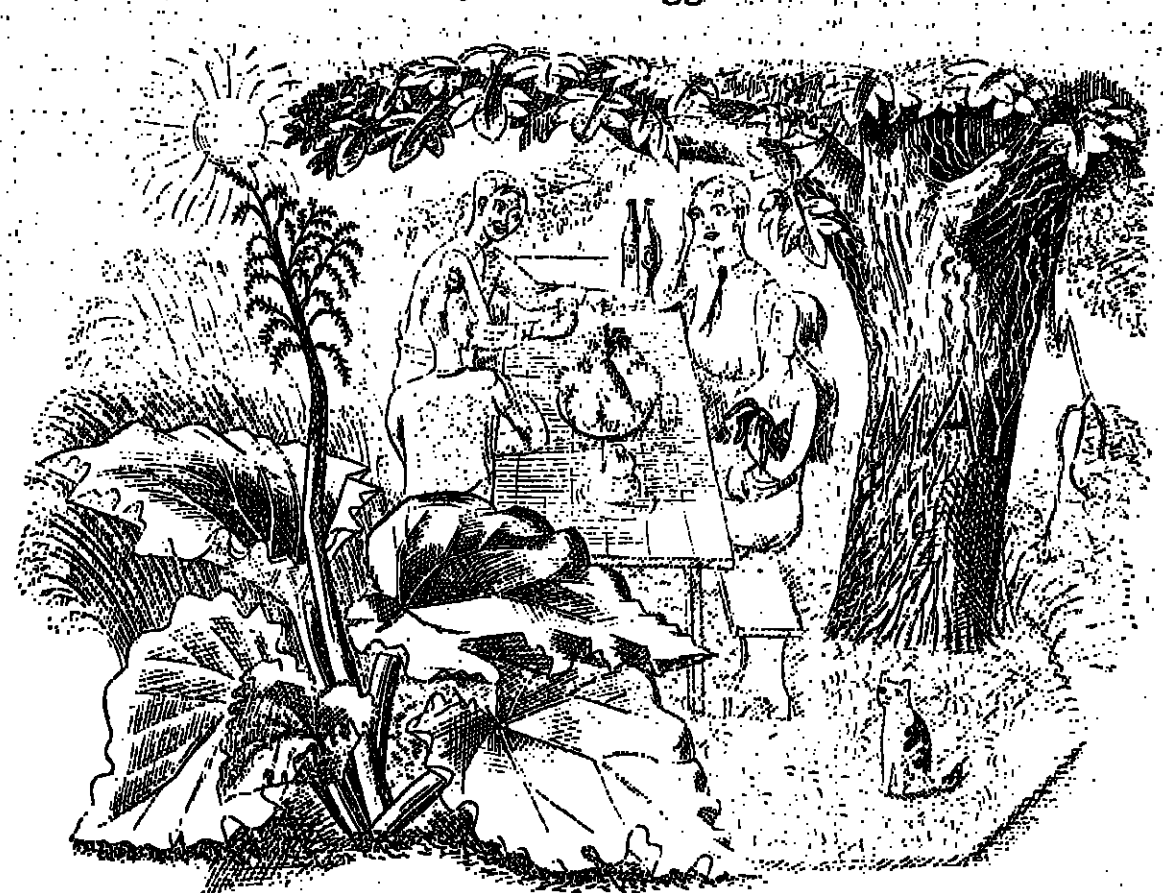
Beryl Cook is a Sunday painter currently on a bit of a vogue. She paints people as a series of painted-up beige balloons, but shoes, flowered aprons, or knitted jumpers receive careful satirical attention. She has illustrated *Seven Years and a Day*, whose best picture is that of a fat cat about the size of a mouse, although even here the animal looks stuffed and boneless. This cat has six toes (quite a common feline feature) and (less common, this) it can grant wishes: in the end, as in the Grimm's fairy tale, it grants an accidental one, causing the plans of seven years to backfire. If the text is subtler than the pictures, neither is at all distinguished.

Although more pleasing, more accomplished, and a great deal more interesting is Deborah King's *Book*, which follows the bird of the title through a year of its life in a series of paintings of a valley in Monmouth. Birds, sky and earth are accurately observed in a way which will encourage children to look at the changing colours about them. Book's story is told objectively, without a trace of sentimentality or anthropomorphism. The text, rather less precise and elegant than the pictures, sometimes seems to be a painter who sees the world as a series of snapshots, and communicates what he sees—exactly what picture books too often fail to do.

Essentially a painter, Brian Wild-Smith has turned his hand to children's books, sometimes with outstanding success. *Professor Nostr's Speeches* works a series of familiar yet still entrancingly drawn exotic animals into a rather feeble myth about pollution, escape to space, and a fresh start in the new world. The destruction of forests and wild life is a rightly disturbing problem, perhaps too serious to be resolved so easily. The adult reader

Putting parents in the picture

By Julia Briggs



"Brick House Garden Party", by Edward Bowden, an illustration to Good Food (Faber and Faber, 1932). The picture is reproduced in Lady Emily Fern, written in the early 1930s by Thomas Hennell with illustrations by Bowden and now published for the first time (Hamish Hamilton, £4.95, 0 241 10468 8).

may be tempted to speculate unconsciously on how many trees have been cut down to provide paper for the print-run. There is, however, a brilliant and uninhibited vitality in the pictures.

Uninhibited is certainly the word for the first of two new books by Victor Ambrose. *Dracula* boldly admits on the title page that "parts of this book are not suitable for adults", while two fangs protruding from a coffin add "the jokes are pretty awful". They certainly are. The book describes in strip cartoon, full of quirky activity and audaciously bad taste, the adventures of Dracula after he has been forced to open his cobwebby castle to the public. Comic horror always goes down well with the young, who enjoy laughing at what might otherwise appear to be frightening. Here is a painter who sees the world as a series of snapshots, and communicates what he sees—exactly what picture books too often fail to do.

While *Dracula* partly depends for its effects on parodying Hammer film cliché, *Inspector Mouse* de-

pends entirely on gangster-film allusions and, in accordance with that laconic mode, relates its story so obliquely that never understood the plot at all. This is a pity, as several of Ralph Steadman's illustrations are highly dramatic. Heavy brushstrokes and fine lines convey an "on the waterfront" architecture of decaying quays and warehouses, silhouetted against luminous airbrushed skies. They introduce an imaginative dimension entirely absent from the text, which makes a determined bid for parental slingers.

It is the pictures that aim for these Frank Muir's *Super What-a-Mess*, where the artist Joseph Wright fills up his pages with miniature comic Vikings, fairies playing golf or tennis, babies riding rabbits, worms wearing leads, and I know not what other whimsy designed to distract the eye from whatever is actually taking place. It would be difficult to tell from the pictures that *What-a-Mess* is in fact a dog, as he has long hair and a face like a stuffed sock. Actually you probably couldn't tell from the text either, since this creature watches tally, imagines himself as Superman, and jumps off the roof. I find it hard to imagine how someone as witty and amusing as Frank Muir could have brought himself to write anything as silly, flat, or heavy-handed. Even its plot derives from the adventure of an excep-

tionally unfunny television cartoon dog called Rhubarb.

Super What-a-Mess, like its predecessor, gives the impression that any television personality feels capable of knocking off the odd children's book from time to time. Clement Freud's *Clicking Vicky* might lend further support to this view, but in fact it does succeed in catching the author's oddly comic tones, as *What-a-Mess* notably fails to do. It has the brilliant inventiveness of Grimaldi (who will ever forget the onion fudge or the morning toast delivery service?), but the story of Vicky, who clicks in her sleep and is used to time a vital race in Suffolk when the world's clocks stop, is unexpected, and padded out with nicely observed details of clothes, newspaper styles, and—of course—food. The book ends reassuringly: "Very soon the world was back the way it had been, only people were much more careful with their rubbish, especially their broken bits of digestive biscuits."

Ingrid and Dieter Schubert's *There's a Crocodile Under My Bed* is almost as reassuringly, the crocodile comes to life, plays with the little girl, and shows her how to make a paper crocodile—by now it has turned into a paunchy reptile-headed uncle. If only it were that easy. Phillida Gill's *Demon Daisy's Dream* is a rather light-hearted fantasy to show in charming

detail all the hair-raising things little girls can get up to without any help from monsters, concluding comfortingly that "her mother wouldn't have changed her for the world". Mrs Gill's drawings establish themselves quietly and simply, with no very obvious debts: Allan Ahlberg and John Lawrence in *A Pair of Sissors*, on the other hand, have set out to evoke a chapbook style, using tinted woodcut set in heavy borders. The verse is deliberately and engagingly excruciating, the pictures energetically comic. Anna's *Medieval World* also employs pastiche. With its heavily decorated borders and busy little figures, it is intended to suggest a book of hours, though the tones are too muted. The text, an account of pre-Renaissance world views, is wildly misleading at times, since it equates believers in the Ptolemaic system of astronomy with flat-earthers.

Finally a book whose visual impact puts everything else in the shade. Brian Thompson's version of *The Story of Prince Rama*, a very summary account of the Ramayana, is illustrated with Rajput paintings. They are, I imagine, heavily reduced, but their bright colours and formal yet loving presentation of flowers, birds, beasts, and demons still fascinate. This is the art of book illustration at its highest—detailed, dynamic, illuminating the story it relates. With all our skills we shall never recapture such telling simplicity.

GILES NEVILLE: *Incidents in the Life of Joseph Grimaldi*. Paintings by Patricia Neville. Cape, £4.95, 0 224 01869 8.

COURTIE O'HARE and BERYL COOK: *Seven Years and a Day*. Collins, £4.50, 0 00 195745 7.

DEBORAH KING: *Book*. Hamish Hamilton, £3.95, 0 241 10372 X.

BRIAN WILDSMITH: *Professor Nostr's Speeches*. Oxford University Press, £3.50, 0 19 279741 7.

VICTOR G. AMBROSIO: *Dracula*. Oxford University Press, £3.95, 0 19 279746 8.

VICTOR G. AMBROSIO: *The Volant Little Tailor*. Oxford University Press, £3.50, 0 19 279727 1.

BERNARD STONK and RALPH STEADMAN: *Inspector Mouse*. Anderson Press/ Hutchinson, £3.50, 0 905478 84 3.

FRANK MUIR: *Super What-a-Mess*. Illustrated by Joseph Wright. Ernest Benn, £3.50, 0 240 00093 5.

CLEMENT FREUD: *Clicking Vicky*. Illustrated by Glynis Ambrose. Polman Books, £3.25, 0 7207 1176 2.

INGRID and DIETER SCHUBERT: *There's a Crocodile Under My Bed*. Hutchinson, £3.50, 0 09 142050 5.

PHILLIDA GILL: *Demon Daisy's Dream*. Cape, £3.75, 0 26203 028 0.

ALLAN AHLBERG and JOHN LAWRENCE: *A Pair of Sissors*. Granada, £2.95, 0 246 11325 1.

MITSUMASA ANNO: *Anna's Medieval World*. Text adapted by Ursula Synges. Bodley Head, £3.95, 0 370 30353 9.

BRIAN THOMPSON: *The Story of Prince Rama*. Kestrel, £7.95, 0 7226 5684 X.

Rituals and rewards

By Ann Evans

ROBERT NYE:
The Bird of the Golden Land
Hamish Hamilton, £4.95,
0 241 10115 0

KEVIN CROSSLEY-HOLLAND:
(Editor):
The Faber Book of Northern Folk-Tales
Faber, £5.50,
0 571 11519 5

Very occasionally there appears a book which miraculously avoids such and every pitfall awaiting the unwary children's author: it is not pretentious nor is it condescending; it is not facetious, gimmicky or urch; it is not exclusively middle-class; it does not wink slyly at the adult reader... Such a book is Robert Nye's *The Bird of the Golden Land*.

The three sons of an impoverished King of Ireland decide to marry. Their father, who sees no way of financing this triple enterprise, sends them on a quest for the fabulous Golden Bird, whose song brings happiness to the heart of the hearer. The successful son shall be awarded the King's crown—his only valuable asset. We follow the fortunes of the three, the youngest of the three, Barefoot, the youngest of the three, after a year and a day of danger, excitement and despair, earns his reward because he is pure in heart and knows neither greed nor pride. The plot is intricate,

but rooted as it is in trusty fairy-tale tradition the youngest reader should follow its twists and turns with ease and be deeply satisfied by its ritual and its deeply recurring patterns. Moreover, here is an author who cannot write a graceless phrase and whose voice is at all times that of the poet.

The adult reader, if he listens as well as looks, will hear familiar echoes: the bird of the Golden Land was singing and singing, like all summer, into a golden ball and given a voice that had the whole of summer's sweetness in it. The seven-year-old who has never even heard of Andrew Marvell will be no less enriched by the overtones of this sort of writing. As a bit of sheer "joyous over-plus", this story is also very funny, and the artist, Krysna Turska, has caught the flavour of the humour and the wit to perfection. It is a rare indeed to have so happy a marriage between text and illustrations.

In complete contrast, which is not in any way to denigrate it, is *The Faber Book of Northern Folk-Tales*, edited by Kevin Crossley-Holland and illustrated by Alan Howard. This is a companion volume to *The Faber Book of Northern Legends* and contains thirty-five folk tales from a variety of sources within the countries and islands of Northern Europe. It is a work of artistic integrity and dedicated research, and perhaps because of this some of the stories may have more appeal to the scholar of folklore than to the

Jam without honour

By John Fuller

ROBERT GRAVES:
An Ancient Castle
Illustrated by Elizabeth Graves
Pinter, £3.95,
0 7206 0567 9

There are two strands to this story by Robert Graves, written in the 1930s but now first published: the first is an attempt by a morally disreputable businessman and his chauffeur to discredit the caretaker of the castle and get him sacked; the second is a history of the castle itself and the discovery of treasure in it by the caretaker's son. The connection between these strands is, of course, a familiar Gravesian concern with codes of honour. The caretaker is

an ex-soldier who laments the disintegration of modern warfare. The businessman has made a fortune by purveying rotten jam to the men in the trenches. The chauffeur was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal simply for driving the General's car, whereas the caretaker was awarded it at the front.

Children will enjoy the ingenuities of the plot against the caretaker and the way in which it is defeated by his honest simplicity and by the role of the castle itself. We are reminded of the feelings about rotten jam in Frank Richards's *Old Soldier Never Die* (re-written by Graves). One man swore that if ever he got back to England he would make it his first duty to shoot up the managing director and all the other heads of that particular firm. The businessman's

disfigurement in *An Ancient Castle* is such a twisted form of revenge: the point about the DCM (a key mover in the plot) is reminiscent of the lance-corporal in *Goodbye to All That* (about whom Graves recommended for a VC but who only got a DCM); and the precious status of the caretaker puts us in mind of the lengthy discussions in both the adult books of the public's contempt for ex-soldiers.

The result is a book of a slightly dated, local interest. The prose is rational and well-organized, explains everything beautifully, but with an unnatural flat and patient tone. The vivid, short-sentenced and evocative panache of *Goodbye to All That* is quite abandoned, as is the conception of the junior reader. But despite all this, and despite odd stiff illustrations by Graves's wife, it is a good read, and was clearly well worth exhuming.

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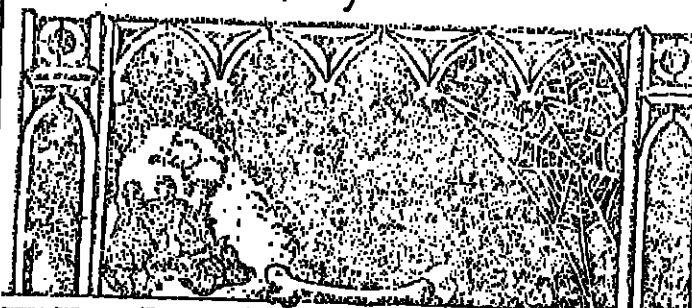
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Gory ghosts

By Brian Baumfield

WEDDIE EVON: The Ghost of Christmas Present and Other Stories. Illustrated by Ken Langstaff. Frederick Warne, £4.95. 0 242 2705 5

ALAN RUMI PETERSON: Frankenstein's Aunt. Hodder and Stoughton, £3.95. 0 340 34933 1

JAN KNIGHT: A-Z of Ghosts and the Supernatural. Illustrated by Valerie Littlewood. Pepper Press, £3.95. 0 560 74509 5

GEORGE HUGHES: Meet the Vampire. Harper and Row, £3.95. 0 397 31833 2

SEYMOUR SIMON: Creatures From Lost Worlds. Harper and Row, £3.95. 0 397 31834 0

Here is a mixture of gore and ghosts—ready for foggy winter nights when things are not always what they seem.

Variable in quality and style, as these books are, the best of the bunch is perhaps *The Ghost of Christmas Present* and *Other Stories*. These tales for children have a unique flavour and some of them are distinctly uncomfortable. Most children relish a little

gloomy terrorizing provided that mysterious threads are neatly tied at the end, and disturbing influences kept firmly in their places. In "The Holey Tree" these requirements are met admirably. The sinister tree is bucked down, refuses to be buried and disturbs the family's Christmas happiness with its eerie manifestations of malevolence. It becomes a thing of sparkling beauty after a seeped in and is planted, whereupon the tree grows again and peace and gaiety is restored to the home.

In some of the other stories questions remain in the mind. Explanations are given, but the ghosts refuse to go away—in the story of Amos, the little mill boy, the reasons for the spectral manifestations are chilling. An original collection of stories, firmly illustrated by Ken Langstaff.

Frankenstein's aunt comes to visit her nephew's castle in order to restore the good name of the family with the villagers and others who live in dread of the sinister happenings which took place there. The sherry-sipping Aunt Frankenstein is an original creation, and is any more than a match for any absurd and sinister scenes are enacted. The monster is brought to life again (of course) and a werewolf appears, with Count Dracula thrown in for good measure. Some-thing though, the lightness of touch which sustains the narrative to be as sure as an antidote for vampire bites. Hodder and Stoughton have also produced *Frankenstein's Aunt* as a cassette.

The A-Z of Ghosts and the Supernatural contains generally

Aiming to improve

By Alan Brownjohn

ELEANOR DOAN (Editor): A Child's Treasury of Verse. Hodder and Stoughton, £5.95. 0 340 24952 8

DAISY WALLACE (Editor): Giant Poems. Illustrated by Margot Tomes. 0 560 74507 9

Witch Poems. Illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman. 0 560 74506 0

Pepper Press, £3.50 each.

The notion of a compendious anthology which mixes the best of the traditional and the new and reflects all aspects of childhood experience is an honourable one; but Eleanor Doan's voluminous and carefully selected *A Child's Treasury of Verse* contains over 400 poems (though this includes numerous passages of scripture set out as poems) and the majority of them are mediocre. The tone is truculently old-fashioned. There is no necessity anything wrong with that, but Miss Doan's choice of content recalls those old, crammed anthologies of the thousand or so "best poems" where everything was sentimental or balefully moralistic. This book at least gives its poems more air on the page than such earnest Victorian poems, such as those old, crammed anthologies of the thousand or so "best poems" where everything was sentimental or balefully moralistic.

Miss Doan states her own moralistic (and unpoetic) intentions in no uncertain fashion: "... as you read [this book] again and again you will enjoy adventure, develop character and Christian graces, laugh, think about happy and sad wisdom, become a better person and respond to God's love". The poetry here is clearly going to be chosen, first and foremost, to improve and inspire. It should not follow automatically from such a premise that Miss Doan's judgement will be erratic at best, and probably leaden; yet an anthology who commits playing errors of purpose is somehow almost bound to compound them with errors of taste.

In fact, *A Child's Treasury of Verse* does contain about one child's eye view of the world, and a good and interesting poem for every three selections. Its design, primarily, for the use of young American readers means that the editor has had to discount to a large host of indifferent versifiers—though such American verse for children may be no feeble than the British product. It also means that some of her choices will be tedious or puzzling to children here, as for example in "Fourth of July".

For tripe and in bursting jackets, crackers in scarlet packets. We'll be up at crack of day, Fourth of July—Hurrah! Hurrah! But there is a much more serious

fault apparent everywhere in the book. Miss Doan seems unable to distinguish between (1) the value of Helen Steiner Rice ("It's me again, God") and a Walt Whitman. There is fortunately rather more of Whitman, Longfellow, Emerson and Holmes (A little girl's heart must be wide and deep, To hold all the things that she likes to keep, but there are many Holmeses in *A Child's Treasury of Verse*).

Without the most powerful native talents Miss Doan's anthology would be dire indeed. Arbitrarily divided into separate (improving) sections—"Bits of Wisdom", "Courtesy and Graces", "Lessons to Learn" and others—this enormous array of bad verse for children ("Suppose the little Cowslip/Should hang its golden cup/And say 'I'm such a little flower/I'd better not grow up'") shows how much needs to be done, even now, to provide editors, teachers and parents that verse for young children can be fresh, varied and original; a challenge to the imagination, and still moral if you wish.

Whether it is witches or giants, the illustrations which almost engulf the poems in the two Pepper Press books, *Giant Poems* and *Witch Poems*, certainly call the tune. It is not, even now, to provide an unobtrusive support for poems; things are different now, and the

eye has to drag itself away, for example, from Margot Tomes's skillful yet overwhelming two-page spread around James Stephens's "In the Orchard" to realize the very subtle alarm, and the final sense of reassurance, in this poem about a menacing giant:

I tried to get away—But, as I slid Under a bush, he saw me, and he bent Down deep at me, and said, "Where is she hid?"

But, while he searched, I turned and simply flew Round by the lilac bushes back to you.

This is beautiful, and of course quite enough without pictorial bludgeoning. The poems on the thirty-two heavily illustrated pages of *Giant Poems* or *Witch Poems* could be printed perhaps on twelve pages. It is probably why the verse seems thin or unenterprising for editors, teachers and parents that such arresting themes, and the number of poems small; with grand guignol pictures like these, who needs to search beyond *Macbeth*, or well-known Cummings and Parson poems, or accessible Laura Richards and Jack Prelutsky, for a wider, more interesting choice? Miss Tomes's giants are more finely and evocatively achieved than Miss Hyman's luridly achieved witches, but both books treat the words as a marginal accompaniment to the visuals.

However, I have reservations about this title, and they centre, as they so often do, on its likely appeal to children of picture book age. First, it is a story-within-a-story; briefly, three friends are putting on a musical, in which Barley the lamb plays a country girl sweet off to the bright lights and dreams of stardom by smooching Jacko, but rescued from the

excitement of the joke-maker who has to fit twelve feet into a final line that should have five? or who simply wants to get his joke down before the lights and bus stop it? Well, there are moments in plenty like that—like say: "Doctor, doctor, I feel like a sheet of music!" "Really, I must make some notes of that."

There is abundant evidence, too, of a mysterious feature of almost all jokes, whether "awful or good": their conservatism, their tendency to run variations on established models. We can enjoy this, but it is still a puzzle: why, if joke-making is accepted anarchy, is tradition so important? Here, anyhow, are samples of most of the great genres: "Knock, knock." "What is the difference between an x and a y?" "Irish jokes, elephant jokes, "What has...?" Jokes, shaggy dog stories and so on.

Is it, then, only Invertebrate Scroopery that could trigger momentary doubts about such an admirable compromise: especially when so many schools are thanked, so many young contributors named? Not, I think entirely. There are signs, too, of more self-conscious invention; hints that the joke has his or her eye on the opening or closing sequences of "The Two Monks" or that the "Knock-knock" jokes can be easily taken over by the knowing.

But, this said, it is a delightful collection. Incidentally, younger literary critics should be warned that one of the contributors is from East Coker....

Made in Eden

By George Craig

RICHARD STANLEY (Editor): The End. Kestrel, £4.50. 0 7226 5741 2

Q: When is a generous compilation not a generous compilation? A: When it's "The End". And certainly this particular compilation, of answers to the invitation "Send in your worst jokes", should find its way to the foot of a good many Christmas trees. It is a successor to the *Crack-Joke Book* and goes with the blessing of the redoubtable Fungus the Monkeyman ("If you put your nose close to the joke you can actually smell it"); a promise it faithfully keeps.

The thing about awful jokes is that they are conceived just before the gates close on Eden, before the effects of the apple have fully taken hold. They do have a smell (Fungus is right): it is of overripe, unripe pleasure in the glimpsed possibilities of playing games with words. They have a sound, too: like the one you come across when someone, hearing a tune accurately, enough inside his own head, writes it down and unwittingly wrong. What would kill an adult limerick (missed rhyme, failed scansion) is half the strength of the child's one. How can we not share in the impatient

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Foul but funny

By Gillian Cross

ROALD DAHL: The Twits. Illustrated by Quentin Blake. Cape, £3.50. 0 224 01855 8

SHIRLEY HUGHES: Here Comes Charlie Moon. Hodley Head, £3.75. 0 370 30335 0

MARY WELFARE: Witchdust. Illustrated by Shirley Hughes. John Murray, £4.95. 0 7195 3789 4

The *Twits* is a disgusting book. But that is not a criticism. Roald Dahl has deliberately set out to create, in his illustrations to Mary Welfare's *Witchdust*. The story itself is pedestrian. Two elderly witches find their powers declining. This magic dust which restores it has been accidentally spilt on the egg and dog. Part of the story follows the attempts of the two witches to steal the solvent and regain their powers, while the rest deals with the activities of the mischievous cat and the faithful dog, both of whom can now cast spells. Unfortunately,

flavour and similarly the story, although it is competently told, lacks any memorable characters or distinctive atmosphere.

That is said, since Shirley Hughes is capable of the most exuberant and joyful originality, as is shown in her illustrations to Mary Welfare's *Witchdust*. The story itself is pedestrian. Two elderly witches find their powers declining. This magic dust which restores it has been accidentally spilt on the egg and dog. Part of the story follows the attempts of the two witches to steal the solvent and regain their powers, while the rest deals with the activities of the mischievous cat and the faithful dog, both of whom can now cast spells. Unfortunately,

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although there are amusing moments, these different elements do not come together into a coherent story.

This unremarkable tale has been illustrated by Shirley Hughes with a series of delightful drawings, full of movement and humour. They reveal more than the story does, not only about appearances but about character. It is an education in the power of illustrations to look at the pictures of the Great Tartan Witch, then to re-read the end of the story where she turns up. The character in the story has no kind of distinguishing features. The dog, craggy, rather terrifying which that one imagines is entirely the creation of Shirley Hughes.

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Tales of Polly and the Hungry Wolf

Catherine Storr

Just twenty-five years after *Claver Poll*, and the *Stupid Wolf* was first published comes a brand-new collection of 'Polly' stories, in which the ever-hungry Wolf's tireless attempts to win possession of Polly by fair means or foul are frustrated, as ever, by her own quick wits. With drawings by Jill Bennett. £3.95

Horse of Air

Lucy Rees

When her mother and father separated Julie's world fell to pieces. The family dispersed and she lost everything she cared about. The basement flat in Exmouth was bleak and unwelcoming, and depression overwhelmed her—until she encountered the Welsh cob Brein. Her efforts to look after Brein and her eventual ride to Wales make an absorbing story, in which some of the characters from *Wild Pony* reappear. £5.25

Dog Days and Cat Naps

Gene Kemp

In this lively collection of short stories animals play a prominent part, though not to the exclusion of their human owners, friends and slaves. The moods of the stories vary as widely as the characters portrayed, though humour is never far from the surface. With drawings by Carolyn Dinan. £4.50

The Faber Book of Northern Folk-Tales

Edited by Kevin Crossley-Holland

Thirty-five folk-tales from Scandinavia and Iceland, Germany, Flanders and the British Isles, drawn not only from such great folklorists as Asbjørnsen and the Brothers Grimm, but also from many lesser-known sources, are here gathered into a handsome volume designed as a companion to *The Faber Book of Northern Legends*. With drawings by Alan Howard. £5.50

Books in brief

LESLIE AND ANGELA CARTER: The Music People

Hamish Hamilton, £3.50. 0 241 10458 0

"The music people" are jolly little cartoon characters like Mr Crotchet, Great Uncle Semibreve, and Treble, a cat who curls up into the shape of the appropriate clef symbol. They all live together in Clef Cottage and do their best to explain themselves to children and "make music fun".

It's a good idea, and children to whom I have shown the book have very much liked the look of it. However, in calling it "a first music book" for "any child" the authors and publishers are casting their net too wide. Although it is true that most of the pieces could be played on the xylophone, *The Music People* is really a piano tutor. It is not a book of songs for piano teachers and their pupils but it would need to be judiciously used.

Musical notation isn't all that hard to grasp if it is linked to practical

music-making and introduced in small enough steps. Leslie and Angela Carter have packed too much information into their book with the result that the child is asked to wade through seven pages of theory before playing a single note, and another five before attempting a very simple piece.

There is a lot more to a good musical education than understanding the antics of the inhabitants of Clef Cottage. Great Uncle Semibreve and his friends give children very little encouragement to improve their playing skills, or experiment with sounds, or to discover that music can express feeling. Towards the end of the book the pupil is urged to "try and play these pieces with extra elements that aren't written into the music—like 'vitality', 'bounce', 'swing', etc.". If the authors placed more emphasis on such "extra elements" as these, their readers would have a better chance of finding out that music itself can be just as much fun as looking at comic book characters.

Wendy Cope

RAY SMITH AND STEPHEN OLIVER: Jacko's Play

Macmillan, £5.99 (without record £3.95). 0 333 30699 0

Macmillan are trying something new here. The idea is good, of a genuinely complementary book-and-record set, with songs by Stephen Oliver on the record amplifying the basic picture-caption text of the book.

However, I have reservations about this title, and they centre, as they so often do, on its likely appeal to children of picture book age. First, it is a story-within-a-story; briefly, three friends are putting on a musical, in which Barley the lamb plays a country girl sweet off to the bright lights and dreams of stardom by smooching Jacko, but rescued from the

hollow glitter by Teddy, the honest farmer who loves her. I think that children would find it difficult to keep the roles outside the musical distinct from those inside, especially as we are given little introduction to the characters. All three are soft toys. Barley is the most attractive, wigged in golden ruffles, and wearing, apparently, a crocheted bed-jacket; though she strikes some grotesque poses for the camera, she has an unassuming character with her big blue eyes, her that ungraceful thing, an unappealing bear Jacko, for some reason, is a glove puppet, and his lack of legs gives him a rather ghastly look.

The biggest difficulty though is that the whole thing is based on nostalgia for Broadway and Hollywood forty or so years ago. The total effect relies on associations which young children could not possibly bring to it.

Ivy Chant

GORDON SMELL: Amy Johnson—Queen of the Air

Hodder and Stoughton, £4.95. 0 340 25203 0

Appearing in a series devoted to "Twentieth-Century People", this book treats Amy Johnson as an example of adventurous heroism. Yet her fame is based on a flight that took place fifty years ago; readers in the age of the Laker Sky-train may need help in order to understand her achievement.

In its structure the book is propelled towards "The Great Flight", with narrative economy the main consideration. It begins with an account of her arrival in Australia, and there follows a clear and lively description of Amy Johnson's background and childhood; the thwarted conclusion, when Amy Johnson, happy to be a professional pilot at last, was lost after parachuting into the sea.

Mark Casserley

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